

BOOKS BY  
E. WINGFIELD-STRATFORD

*The Victorian Trilogy*

THE VICTORIAN TRAGEDY

THE VICTORIAN SUNSET

THE VICTORIAN AFTERMATH

*and*

THE HISTORY OF BRITISH CIVILIZATION

THEY THAT TAKE THE SWORD

NEW MINDS FOR OLD

ETC.

THE HARVEST OF  
VICTORY  
1918-1926

By  
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WITH 3 MAPS

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To  
MY COUSINS  
HARRY AND GEORGIE

I have to thank Mr. E. H. Short  
for much valuable help.





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## INTRODUCTION

*My Victorian trilogy was an effort to assist in the comprehension, from a British standpoint, of the Pre-war age. In this and a subsequent volume I am trying to do the same for our immediate past.*

I may be told that the task is impossible ; and so no doubt it is, in the sense of arriving at a complete and final estimate of this, or any other age. He who should cherish such an ambition, though he were to outlive Methuselah, would come no nearer his goal than the man who stands on the bank of the river, patiently waiting to cross until it has flowed by. We must get as near to the truth as we can, here and now, according to the light that is given us.

No age—and least of all our own—can afford to wait for its history. For the idea of history as a barren or academic exercise is an utter and mortal fallacy. It is the most practical, the most urgently needed, of all the sciences, conferring, as it does, on mankind the consciousness of its undying past, and endowing it with the vision and perspective that alone can give it power to command its destiny in the future. To cut off the present from the past by some arbitrary gap of twenty or fifty or a hundred years, and thus to deprive mankind of memory, is plainly suicidal.

It may be said that no man can take a detached view of his contemporaries, as if detached or final appreciations were any more common of our remote predecessors. The verdict of history on Washington or Cromwell or Cæsar is no more than that of the latest juryman who chooses to empanel himself. It is certainly a safer business to label or libel the dead than the

living; to accuse Cromwell, for instance, of having engineered his King's escape from Hampton Court in order to make certain of doing him to death, than a modern statesman of an equally diabolical plot to rig the stock markets by putting about false news of a British defeat. But the fact of dead men having no rights and no friends is scarcely likely to weigh with any reputable historian.

The historian of the remote past has certainly the advantage in his access to sources of evidence that only time can bring to light. But he has a compensating handicap in the necessity imposed on him of annihilating his own past and being born again into the atmosphere of another age, a task almost superhuman. Which of us can form any precise notion of what was signified by his godhead to Alexander or his Church to Hildebrand? We can, of course, follow the modern fashion of taking a young lady out of Ealing and putting her on the stage as Cleopatra, or writing of trench life before Troy as if the Scamander were the Somme, but that is a child's game of makebelieve, harmless in itself, but worse than no history. Human nature grows by what it experiences, and to divest oneself of the heritage of centuries is a *tour de force* of imaginative genius all too seldom accomplished.

I do not think that many people will seriously quarrel with an estimate of Thucydides and Gibbon as among, and perhaps actually, the greatest historians of all time. But I should be inclined to place less faith in the Englishman's account of Rome or Byzantium, than in the Athenian's of his own, Periclean Athens.

I conclude, therefore, that the historian of his own times is faced with difficulties other, but not necessarily greater, than his who selects his field in the remote past. And difficulties are not to be evaded, but faced, and—as far as possible—overcome.

One is so frequently labelled optimist, or pessimist, that it may not be out of place to say that neither of

these attitudes is possible to a believer in free will as a working principle, which is as much as to say, to any sane man. If we were inevitably bound for Utopia or the dogs, there would be no sense in taking any action, or writing anything whatever; the most consistent philosopher would be the patient most advanced in a state of general paralysis.

But we are only free to deal with the situation that we ourselves have freely created. We cannot escape from the past, because it lives and culminates in the present. If, a year ago, I received five talents, I was *free to make ten*. If, in the course of that year, I have thrown four of the talents out of the window, I am still free, but I am faced with a stiffer proposition. Plain, hard work might have done the business before; now it may be a case for something approaching genius.

Let us apply this to our present situation. Life is the adaptation of creature to environment. In the pre-human past the tempo of that adaptation has been limited, so that a revolutionary change of environment has always meant death to the species. Man, in the Machine Age, has contrived to revolutionize his own environment—an unprecedented feat. The crucial question is whether discourse of reason will enable him to perform the equally unprecedented feat of revolutionizing himself. Failing that, his civilization, and possibly his species, are doomed, if only for the reason that the energies he has succeeded in exploiting are incomparably more swift and potent to destroy than to benefit, and if not controlled by an adequate intelligence, will inevitably do so.

The Nineteenth Century and its Pre-war aftermath were a time of partial adaptation culminating in partial suicide. The failure to adapt resulted in a social system capable of gleaning, but not of harvesting, the benefits of mechanical power, and in an international anarchy that ensured that this power should sooner or later be employed, very efficiently, not to benefit, but to destroy civilization.

Since the War, the ever-increasing destructive forces

at Man's disposal and vulnerability of his social organism, together with the strain already imposed upon that organism by the War, have rendered it overwhelmingly probable that a *fresh failure in adaptation* will culminate not in partial, but complete suicide.

The settlement after the War afforded a golden opportunity for profiting by its lessons, and establishing a new world order from which war should be eliminated and machine power made to yield its full harvest not only of wealth, but of welfare.

And there the story begins. What will be the end, if there is destined, in our time, to be an end, rests upon our choice and decision.

# BOOK I

## TO MEN OF GOODWILL

### CHAPTER I

#### VICTORY

**I**N the year that is dated 1918 from the birth of Jesus Christ, precisely at the stroke of eleven on the eleventh day of its eleventh month, a strange and startling silence descended on a battle front that stretched from the Alpine foothills to the flats where the Scheldt widens into the North Sea. For more than four years, the men who had watched and hidden on either side of the strip called No Man's Land had accepted orders to destroy, ruthlessly, deliberately, and with all the resources of modern science, everything human that lay in front of them. Everyone of these men had lain under a sentence of violent death that, though it kept no certain hour, had already been executed on millions, on and behind different fronts, up and down the world. And now, for those who had managed to survive up to the striking of this hour, the sentences were cancelled. Henceforth one might live and must let live. Except in one or two remote quarters where its embers still flickered, the War was in fact, if not legally, over.

The men, and particularly those of them who wore the English khaki, received the news without excitement. War had exhausted their capacity for feeling or reacting strongly to any stimulus. They had got, for the most part, into the habit of living from moment to moment, and chancing the future. And the routine of military life went on, beneath the grey November

skies, without a moment's intermission. There were still fatigues to be performed, equipment to be smartened, weary limbs and perhaps aching bellies to be dragged through rain and slush to Rhineland billets. It was only gradually that the hypnotic trance that had turned men into herd units began to lift, and the spirit of an army faded into that of civilian workers, impatient to be back at their jobs and to gather up the threads of their real lives.

The bond, that was only gently loosened in the victors, was snapped in the vanquished. One of the few touches of final drama on the Western Front was when a German machine gunner loosed off the whole of his remaining cartridges in one wild fusillade, and then, punctually at the hour, rose erect and unharmed above ground, and, after taking final stock of a line that he and his comrades had bent and stretched, but never broken, turned his face Eastward, and stalked moodily in the direction of his Fatherland and native village. As an army, the great German horde had ceased to function. All had been done that men could do, and all in vain. In Hans and Otto and Ludwig was no longer the lust to conquer, nor stomach to resist. It was something that a few picked troops could be kept together to march back, with a pathetic swagger, through the Brandenburg Gate at Berlin. But for most it was a melancholy stampede to reach home by the limited means available, packed like sardines in any sort of rolling stock—a few crouched on the roofs of carriages. Not even Hindenburg could have got them back to the sticking point.

The striking of the same hour that brought silence to the trenches, chased it from the cities within effective bombing range. In London the banging of the maroons that had been wont to signalize the approach of death out of the sky, was the signal for a wilder, madder mafficking than anything dreamed of in the days of the almost forgotten South African War. It was more of a wake than a triumph. Almost—perhaps quite—without exception, those who danced



and fraternized in the streets had paid the price in the loss of some friend or near relative. With fine dramatic instinct, Mr. Noel Coward has staged the by no means improbable incident of a mother, who has only that morning learnt that the last of her sons has been killed, being caught up in the crowd, a rattle in one hand and a squeaker in the other, hysterically cheering. Was it not human to let oneself go after all these years of tension, to forget the cost and think only of the victory?

For on this at least all were agreed, that victory it was, the most famous and complete of all time. Victory almost incredible, when one remembered that a few brief months ago the German armies had been everywhere victorious or sweeping forward to victory, and it had only been a question of the British army putting its back against the wall and fighting to the last. And here was Germany, with her allies vanquished, her fleet in mutiny, and her royal Houses chased from their thrones, on her knees begging for whatever terms her enemies might see fit to impose on her. "Oh how suddenly", as the Psalmist had once exclaimed of the triumphant ungodly, "they consume and perish and come to a fearful end!" Had ever, in all recorded history, victory been so dazzling or defeat so catastrophic?

So at least it appeared to the man in the London street, and to the statesmen at Westminster, who heard Mr. Lloyd George, the Prime Minister, reciting the almost unbelievably drastic terms that the enemy had been fain to swallow. Is it any wonder that the wine of victory went even to the gravest heads? Perhaps the seemliest reaction was that of Mr. Lloyd George himself in leading his fellow-Members to the neighbouring Church of St. Margaret, to give thanks to a God who had been adjured with equal fervour by all parties to the dispute, and had at long last decided, presumably, in favour of the right combination. It would seem a pity, now, that the thanksgiving was not accompanied by a prayer, like that of

Solomon, for wisdom, for never would it be more needed than in months so big with the destinies of mankind as those to follow!

But for the greatest, no less than the least, it was enough that the victors had acquired irresistible force to impose whatever terms, wise or foolish, their interests or passions might dictate. It only remained to find words to express the all-completeness of the triumph. The very word victory had become a magic incantation fit to stimulate the sale of bonds, soap, and shoddy of every kind and description. The illustrated pages of the press were prolific of Britannias, lions, and John Bulls, rampant and regal. And the climax was reached when Lord Curzon informed his fellow-peers, in his rotund phrasology, that Shelley's dream was about to come true,

*The world's great age begins anew,  
The golden years return!*

This was a little strong even for the first week of the Armistice, but writing more than ten years later a fellow-Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill, could state with equal solemnity that "the conclusion of the Great War raised England to the highest position she had yet attained."

In the caption to one of his cartoons, Mr. Max Beerbohm gives, as the sole remark likely to have been made by Benjamin Jowett about the Pre-Raphaelite paintings at the Oxford Union,

"And what were they going to do with the Grail when they found it, Mr. Rossetti?"

If Jowett had survived till Armistice Day, one imagines that his first remark, on hearing the maroons, might have been,

"And what are they going to do with the victory now they have won it?"

But Jowett was dead, and if it occurred to anyone else to ask this simple and rather obvious question, his voice must have been drowned in the general jubilation.

## CHAPTER II

### ANOTHER SCRAP OF PAPER

Victory, if it is to satisfy the emotional demands of the victors, must be complete and unconditional. And it was probably in subconscious response to these demands that from the first no one, however high in authority, seems to have noticed that the very completeness of this particular victory had been purchased on conditions.

Even in November, 1918, the Allied commanders had shrunk from driving Germany to desperation and the last ditch. They were soldiers, and not unnaturally regarded the matter from the strictly military standpoint, as if the armies had been counters in the war game. And in the military sense, as Field Marshal Haig put it so late as the 26th of October, Germany was not broken. The Allies had out-run their means of transport and, as time was to prove, would have the greatest difficulty in getting their armies forward, even if there were no enemy at all. Haig would have been for granting the Germans terms even milder than those that were actually demanded, and Foch himself would have been generous enough, at his ally's expense, to allow Germany to keep her surface warships.

Looking back on it now we can see that the problem had passed out of the sphere of tactics and strategy. The point of psychological collapse had been reached, and after the mutiny of the fleet and expulsion of the princes, it was only a question of whether the army would crumble away harmlessly, or go red and infect the whole of Europe with the virus of Bolshevism.

But the fact remains that the Allied High Command was decidedly anxious to get the Germans to leave off and go home quietly, if that were possible.

They were certainly determined—or at any rate Foch was—to make it a complete and final surrender of the power to resist in the field. Germany was to throw down her arms and surrender at discretion—about that there was no question of compromise. But she might be offered a decisive inducement for taking this step, if she could be assured of the right kind of peace, though decidedly not the kind of peace she would have imposed herself if she had had the opportunity. But there is no greater enthusiast for justice and impartiality than the unjust man vanquished, and if Germany could be sure of a settlement based on these virtues, she would doubtless be well advised to forego the empty glory of prolonging resistance—if prolonged it could be.

By what must have seemed to her statesman a redeeming mercy, the latest and most powerful of all her adversaries was known to be definitely in favour of such a peace. The German knew what mercy he had to expect from France and Belgium, nor was there much more hope in an England infuriated by the submarine campaign. But the position of the United States, and of her President, Woodrow Wilson, was different. And it was the United States that held the keys of power not only over Germany, but over the Allies themselves. Once let that support be withdrawn, and not only would the sword arm of the victors be paralysed, but they themselves would be without food or money. In consequence, it was fairly safe to assume that when Wilson said "do this", it would be performed.

It was notorious that Wilson had definitely dissociated himself and his country from the hatreds and ambitions of the European anarchy of nations. The United States had no traditional scores to settle and no hunger for territory. She had no need even for indemnities, since she had already, in her capacity of

creditor, become entitled to a crushing tribute from her allies, which she could leave them to collect from their enemies, or not, as they pleased. She was, in fact, under no temptation of self-interest to wander from the strait path of righteousness.

Her President stood forth in the eyes of the world, and even of his enemies, as a man apart from the diplomats of the European anarchy and the politicians of his own country. Here was that unique and blessed phenomenon of a man capable of detaching himself from the pettiness of collective egotism, and regarding the supreme problem of world settlement from the standpoint not of this or that nation, but of humanity itself. He was a scholar and a philosopher. There were officers in the British Army who had taken the Historical Tripos at Cambridge and had derived what knowledge they possessed of comparative politics from the one authoritative treatise that then existed on the subject, by this same Woodrow Wilson.

Before America had come into the War, there had been a certain detached dignity and even grandeur about Wilson's pronouncements which, though it may have sorely tried the patience of devout Nationalists, seemed not unworthy of one of those philosopher politicians to whom Plato had committed the governance of his ideal republic. He had spoken of his country as being too proud to fight, and so right that it did not need to convince others by force that it was right. To the clamour of frenzied Nationalists, shouting for a fight to a finish, he had opposed his own ideal of a peace without victory.

Nor had he abandoned this ideal when the mad arrogance of the German military leaders had at last forced him to lead, as he put it, this great and peaceful nation into war. Even while he was forging the tremendous weapon that was to decide the issue of the contest, he was, with that philosophic detachment of his, formulating the principles, not of an allied or American, but of a human and enduring peace. A new world order was to supersede the old, disastrous

anarchy. Peace and international justice were to be secured by a *federation or league of nations*. There was to be no more secret diplomacy of bartering of human souls; no interests but those of the populations concerned must govern the distribution of territory. Thus would the world be made—in a phrase that might have emanated from Abraham Lincoln—"safe for democracy."

It is no wonder that the German people, with ruin staring them in the face, should have turned to this calm, just man, with the chiselled features, as their last hope in extremity. The mirage of a good, German peace, with its vast annexations and crushing indemnities, had indeed faded, but if a Wilson peace could be secured, things might not turn out so badly after all. They were ready to go to all lengths to obtain it. They were ready to send their Kaiser and his dynasty—with all the other dynasties thrown in as a makeweight—packing, when it became evident that they had become an offence to the great democrat. They were ready to throw down their arms, to assent to any terms of surrender, if they could only be assured of the peace whose principles he had so clearly formulated, and refined upon with such meticulous lucidity of definition.

It was another question whether the European Allies, flushed with hatred and victory, could be induced to qualify the triumph that lay within their grasp, and deal with the Hun, now that he was at last beaten to his knees, on a footing of justice and impartiality. No doubt it lay within the power of the United States to withdraw her armies, now launched on the full tide of victory, and negotiate a separate peace. But was it thinkable that even the mightiest of rulers could take such a responsibility on his shoulders? In the inflamed state of the war fever that had seized America as well as Europe, it might have been as much as his Presidency or even his life was worth, to order what would have been denounced as the blackest betrayal in history.

As a matter of fact, during the secret interchanges that were taking place between the Allies before the Armistice terms were presented, this threat was actually launched. For Wilson's terms included, in effect, a settlement of accounts not only between America and Germany, but between America and Britain. The old question of the so-called freedom of the seas that had brought the two countries to war in 1812, to the verge of war in 1861, and had produced a situation of dangerous tension while America was still a neutral in the current War, was to be settled once and for all in her favour, and the decisive weapon of blockade was to be struck out of Britain's hand. On this point Mr. Lloyd George had refused to budge an inch. Clemenceau, his French colleague, who had every reason for marching in step with England, quietly supported him. The allies would be sorry—but they would fight on. As nobody wanted this to happen, it was decided that England, while not explicitly rejecting this particular point of Wilson's, reserved her right to interpret it in her own way: the polite equivalent, in practice, of "nothing doing."

Wilson had resorted to menace, and it had been called as bluff. The experienced men of the world who had successfully withstood him on this vital issue, must have felt that they had the measure of him henceforward. The President was a man of strong words and gestures, but not one to pursue his strong line to the point of open rupture. His Puritan conscience would never allow him to abandon a principle, but it might be stretched to an infinite elasticity of interpretation.

Thus Colonel House, who represented the United States on the Allied Council, was allowed to supplement Wilson's Fourteen Points, or foundations of peace, by an elaborate commentary, which, as Mr. Winston Churchill drily remarks, was "certainly an accommodating document."<sup>1</sup> Its effect was to suggest that the Points might be susceptible of a much

<sup>1</sup> *The World Crisis*, Vol. 5, p. 107.

greater latitude of interpretation than the plain man had hitherto suspected. Thus, "the removal, as far as possible, of all economic barriers," did not mean the removal or even the lowering of tariffs, but merely that a member of the League of Nations was not to discriminate in its tariffs between one partner and another. It was plainly implied that a "free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial settlement of all colonial claims" did not necessarily exclude a settlement in which Germany, for "equitable" reasons, might be stripped of all her colonies. Reduction of armaments was not to be below the level necessary for national defence—which might, by interpretation, be any level. This commentary must have been extremely consoling to the Allied statesmen, by its suggestion that the Wilsonian Points might turn out to be also Euclidian in their lack of substance. It might have been less consoling to those of Germany. But then, with an instinctive tact, no hint of it was vouchsafed to them.

One open qualification, however, besides that concerning the freedom of the seas, the Allies found it necessary to slip in at the last moment, before accepting the Fourteen Points. The word "indemnities" was not to be breathed, but common justice required that Germany should be required to pay at least for the civilian damage she had inflicted. More than that Wilson would not concede, and at that the Allies were content to leave it. The total charge of a bill need not necessarily be affected by the items charged for.

The important thing was to get Wilson to consent to the Armistice terms in the belief that his principles reigned triumphant, and the Germans to surrender on the understanding that the honour of their enemies was pledged to a peace, not of victory, but of strict impartiality, under Presidential guarantee.

Having achieved this double object, it remained to frame the terms of surrender in such a way that Germany should be rendered, and kept, powerless to



resist any demands whatever that might be made on her in her enemies' good time. This was the task of the military and naval experts, who accomplished it with the neatness of the wasp, paralysing the caterpillar in which it intends to lay its eggs. They did not trouble to stipulate for demobilization—that would take care of itself. But they confiscated enough of arms and rolling stock to render remobilization unthinkable. They occupied the Rhine and provided themselves with bridgeheads from which it would be possible not only to strike at the heart of Germany, but to seize her all-important munition centres on the Ruhr. They left her without sea power.

But that was not enough to render assurance quite sure. Once the tension was relaxed, it would be impossible to keep their own vast armies mobilized. And it might be that when the enemy saw what a peace of impartiality really signified, he might be driven to some desperate resolution to die rather than yield. There was discovered a way of safeguarding against this, and that by a device unprecedented in the history of war. The Armistice was after all to be incomplete; no surrender that the Germans could possibly make would prevent the Allies from continuing to wage war with their most deadly weapon, that of blockade. It was even intensified, for the strangle-hold was now on the Baltic as well as the North Sea ports. During the long months that his fate was being decided, the Hun and his family were to be kept starved in body and broken in spirit, so that when the time came, he might be able to lift a pen to sign, but by no means a sword to resist. It is extremely improbable that if the positions had been reversed, he himself would have acted differently.

Stated thus in cold blood, it might seem as if we were describing the proceedings not of men, but of devils. But to the sympathetic understanding it was all only too human. These statesmen and soldiers were neither bad nor cruel men. They were slaving at their duty, according to their lights. And if the

light that was in them proved to be darkness, that was less their fault than that of their age, and of the mobs of whose passions they were the chosen vehicles. In circumstances that would have taxed the genius of a Buddha or a Socrates, there was only Wilson who dreamed of detaching himself from the demands of the moment, and of basing the new world order on enduring foundations. And on what foundations Wilson himself reposed time would reveal.

Now that the war madness had passed, it is difficult to conceive of the extent to which it had blunted conscience in the belligerent populations. A veritable neurosis of hatred had been worked up by propaganda, and exacerbated by fear. Nor can it be denied that the enemy, by his own proceedings, had done everything possible to foment it.

The organized ruthlessness of the Prussian may fall short of Latin implacability or Muscovite exuberance in cruelty, but it is marked by a theatricality and tactlessness that render it peculiarly galling to its victims. Nobody but a Prussian, with defeat staring him in the face, would have laboured to cripple the productive resources of the country he was forced to evacuate, in the naïve hope that with his own unimpaired, he would be able to obtain a winning commercial advantage, and that the conquerors, in a fit of absent-mindedness, would allow him to get away with it. And only a Prussian, when it had at last dawned upon him that the only way to conciliate Wilson was to call off the submarine campaign against commerce, would have allowed one of his U Boat commanders to stage so damnable and pointless an atrocity as the sinking of one of the Dublin-Holyhead passenger boats. It might have been, and in fact it was, argued by the Germans, that the successful Allied blockade was no less cruel in its effects than their own attempt to counter it. It is better to drown than to starve. But unfortunately for Germany, the proceedings of her U Boats were more obviously and sensationally revolting than the strangle-

hold of unseen Dreadnoughts. It is hardly to be wondered at that *English public opinion*, and still more that of France and Belgium, should have been goaded into a blind fury of resentment, coupled with a determination to exact full reckoning when the time came from an enemy for whom, it seemed, nothing could be too bad.

As for honour, let it be remembered that for the duration of the War the wells of truth had been systematically poisoned. The art of propaganda had been cultivated on both sides as assiduously as that of gunnery, and propaganda largely consisted in the *suppression of truth at home, and the suggestion of falsehood to the enemy*. Lord Northcliffe, the millionaire newspaper boss, who had directed this branch of English service, had been an adept in persuading the Germans that they could obtain a peace precisely opposite to that one of vengeance for which he had set his own papers clamouring. Was it altogether surprising that the bitter pill of the Armistice terms should have been sweetened by so inexpensive a condiment as that of a few empty promises on a scrap of paper?

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PLIGHT OF A VICTOR

Now that Germany was thus disposed of, it was only natural that Englishmen should begin to turn their eyes towards their own country. One could not go on forever, shouting oneself hoarse in one's capacity of victor. What was going to happen now that there was no longer a war on? The simplest answer was that the clock would be put back to where it had been at the time of that final August Bank Holiday in 1914; that the soldiers—such of them as had survived—would become civilians, the war-workers take up their peace-time jobs, and, after the briefest possible interval for joining up with the old threads, life would adjust itself to the agreeably trivial round of politics and sport, of labour disputes and social activities—so infinitely preferable to the routine of the trenches.

This was what, deep down in his heart of hearts, the average man had been hoping and dreaming throughout all the strain and tension of the war years. So long as the issue was undecided, he could keep keyed up to concentrate on the will to win. It was only when the strain had relaxed that he realized how ardent had been his desire to escape, to take refuge in the normal and the commonplace, what a cry from the heart had disguised itself in the refrain of

Hi-tiddy-hi-ti! Take me back to Blighty!  
Blighty is the place for me!

That this would be fully possible seems to have been taken for granted by the great majority of people.

Perhaps the wish was to some extent father to the thought. After all, apart from the inconveniences directly arising from air raids and the submarine blockade, things had gone on surprisingly well on the home front. Not only had there been work for all, but wages on a scale of unprecedented generosity. Numbers of wage earners had contrived to make as good a thing, relatively, out of the War as the profiteers themselves. Middle-class housewives, at their wits' end how to cope with mounting prices and taxation, were loud in their indignation at the "Take it or leave it" attitude of Mary Jane in seal-skins. Even rationing had not proved so bad an arrangement for those who had all along been rationed by the void in their purses. Why should things be any worse now that there was a peace on?

But a mere *statu quo ante* was not by any means enough to satisfy the more sanguine spirits. Surely there was profit as well as glory attached to victory. Was it for nothing that the victors had acquired a call on everything the enemy had to disgorge in the way of wealth and colonies? Some compensation was due for the immense sacrifices of the millions in khaki. The flood-tide of success need not be checked by the Armistice. Let peace too have her victories, and the world's great age begin, at any rate, for those who had earned the right to it by success in arms.

That men could have been so blind to reality seems hard enough to believe now. But at the time it was pathetically natural. The crowd does not calculate, it reacts. And the snapping of so prolonged a strain was bound to be followed by an overwhelming reaction. There had been enough of looking unpleasant facts in the face—and for convalescence there is no tonic like optimism.

And yet optimism in these circumstances was hardly better grounded than that which so notoriously accompanies the latter stages of tuberculosis. For more than four years now, human and mechanical energies had been diverted from useful production into courses of

pure destructiveness. A vast munition industry had proliferated goods that from the human point of view would have been better described as "bads". The business of supporting and enriching life had been cut down to a bare minimum, and, wherever possible, neglected or postponed, leaving a vast accumulation of arrears to be made good. A man who had spent the last four years throwing his wealth with both hands out of the window, borrowing and mortgaging to the utmost of his capacity, might talk of resuming his old way of life, but he would be unpleasantly disillusioned when he came to interview his banker. Why should it fare any better with a people or civilization?

Not better, but in fact considerably worse, since not only had wealth been destroyed, but also the means of renewing it. The repentant prodigal starts again with his own fortune depleted, but with the fortune-making opportunities offered by society intact. Not so the spendthrift civilization. England had been described, not altogether inaptly, as a nation of shopkeepers. But what should we think of a shopkeeper who found food for satisfaction in the destruction or ruin of his customers? The time was not far distant when England would be hardly less anxious to set her enemies on her feet than she had been to knock them off. Look in what direction he would, the outlook was immeasurably blacker for the poor shopkeeper than it had been before the trouble started. There was the enormous expanse of Russia, which for business purposes had practically ceased to exist, though there were other ways in which it might make its existence unpleasantly felt. Elsewhere, in place of customers, there had sprung up new and out-at-elbows businesses, jealously determined to work up the goods for themselves and to shut their doors on the products of the old firm. And in an impoverished world, how, with the best will in the world to buy, was the effective demand for goods and services to be maintained at its former level?

Besides, in the twentieth century, England had become as much a banking as a shopkeeping nation. And this part of her business had been even more gravely affected by the war. In the mad orgie of unproductive expenditure, she had had no choice but to realize her assets, and convert no small part of the usury she had been accustomed to collect for former advances of capital into cash down. In her desperate need, she had been forced, instead of lending capital, to borrow recklessly, and, moreover, to pledge her credit on behalf of allies who, for what were to prove excellent reasons, would not have been trusted on their own recognizances.

There was only one nation capable of making the immense advances that the situation demanded. The United States, even before she had herself been involved as a belligerent, had furnished the Allies with the sinews and munitions of war, at such price as their necessity would permit of her citizens exacting. It had been the not altogether unnatural desire of the Germans to cut off this source of supply, that had impelled them to the worst of their outrages on the High Seas, and finally to the desperate defiance that brought the United States into the War. But it was only the blockade that had prevented that happily-situated nation from being equally accommodating to themselves—a fact which, as we have seen, had led to friction, and threatened worse than friction, between the two branches of the Anglo-Saxon family.

When the United States had at last come into the War as a belligerent, she had—again on a strictly business footing—supported her allies not only in arms but in credit. The result was that, on reckoning up accounts, John Bull and Uncle Sam found the financial tables turned. A handsome tribute due to British citizens had become transformed into a vast burden of indebtedness. Nor were her tributes from the United States the only ones with which England had been compelled to forgo in the pursuit of victory. Her title as creditor nation of the world had crossed

affected by the slackening of demand, while competition from the roads and the air threatened hard times for another key industry, that of railway transport.

It was a safe lead for the platform to say that Britain had emerged from the ordeal stronger than ever before. The precise opposite was the fact. Even in the military sense the War had strained her resources to such an extent as to leave her hardly capable of asserting herself in arms against any considerable opponent. Her enfeebled arm was not strong enough to retain its grip upon Catholic Ireland. Even in India, her Raj was being called in question as it had not been since the Mutiny. Her historic primacy of sea power could no longer be asserted against her rich relation in the West. And at home she was committed to the task of maintaining her enormously-inflated population in employment, and the enjoyment of what, compared with most other nations, and her own past, was a disproportionately high standard of living, against the combined handicaps of tariff-walled markets, ruined customers, slackening demand for her coal, public debt, and crushing taxation.

It was no case for despair, but for those qualities of resource and determination that had enabled England to conquer difficulties no less formidable in the past. But difficulties are not to be overcome in the mood of cowardly optimism that refuses to look them in the face. And England had to face a situation vastly less favourable than that before the War, one in which even the recovery of her lost ground would call for an effort no less stern and far more prolonged than that demanded of her soldiers in putting their backs against the wall, and fighting to the last. Had she the leader capable of rallying her peace forces for such an effort?



## CHAPTER IV

### THE MAD ELECTION

When the proud duty fell to him of reading out the Armistice terms, Mr. Lloyd George enjoyed a prestige unrivalled by that of any other statesman in British history, with the doubtful exception of the elder Pitt. Nor can it be said that this was greater than his deserts. In the darkest period of the War his imaginative fertility and infectious high spirits had been assets of priceless value to the Allied cause. By sheer native intuition he had proved himself again and again possessed of a more penetrating insight into the heart even of a military problem than stiff-witted commanders whose idea of a successful battle was the punching of a mud salient at a loss utterly out of proportion to that of the enemy. No other statesman would have been capable of imparting such a drive as he did to the munitioning of armies and the multifarious activities of a War Cabinet, nor could a greater compliment have been paid than that of Ludendorff, who thought that if Germany had only had a Lloyd George among her politicians, she would have held the course in 1918.

The fact is that Mr. Lloyd George had found, as War Minister, full scope for a talent in which he stood unrivalled. He was a master, a past master, of improvisation. His genius was typically Celtic in the swiftness of its leap from impression to action, a leap as unpredictable as that of a kitten. No man, probably, was ever less capable of the slow and laborious processes of thinking out new problems in the light of old principles, and of mastering all the available evidence

before coming to a conclusion. He trusted, not in vain, to his intuitive genius to provide him with an adequate, and usually a brilliant answer, to the challenge of the moment. Beyond the moment it was not his nature to look. The morrow could take thought for the things of itself.

Such a mental equipment, joined with a quick sympathy and an ardent patriotism, may well suffice for a war Minister, since war is largely a series of improvisations. But the gradual rebuilding of national or world prosperity after a war requires a wisdom that is not of the moment, but is based on a rock of enduring principle. As in Plato's Republic, a man must be a philosopher before he can qualify as a ruler. And Mr. Lloyd George's greatest admirer would hardly describe him as a philosopher statesman, even in the highly-qualified sense that would be proper to Wilson.

Only a philosopher, with something of the quality of a saint, could have been proof against the temptation to ride on the flood-tide of popularity, and to take advantage of what so consummate a political tactician must have realized was a matchless opportunity of confirming his power. For Mr. Lloyd George's Premiership had itself been an improvised arrangement, based on no ascertainable principle except the obvious and sufficient one of getting ahead and winning the War. Now that the War was won, the anomaly of his position was bound to make itself felt. In a Liberal Parliament, he depended mainly on the support of Conservatives, who had not even yet come to regard him as one of themselves. To most of his former colleagues in the Liberal Government, his jockeying of his chief and predecessor Asquith out of the Premiership had constituted an unforgivable offence. His power was founded on no electoral mandate. Such a mandate was now to be had for the asking. It was obviously the moment for forcing a general election.

It would be needlessly cynical to imply that Mr.

Lloyd George was swayed only by personal considerations in coming to such a decision. On the plainest grounds of statesmanship a general election was called for. Parliament had already created what might some day prove to be an extremely dangerous precedent, by prolonging its own life for three years after its appointed time. Only the plea of dire necessity could justify such a course even for a day, and that necessity was now removed with the signing of the Armistice. Besides, it was of supreme importance that when Mr. Lloyd George went to Paris at the head of the British Peace Delegation, he should go armed with the unmistakable authority of the country he represented.

Personal interest thus joined with honesty and expediency in dictating an immediate appeal to the constituencies. It was the manner of that appeal that would put to the test those qualities of wisdom and self-restraint that are the crown of statesmanship. Never had the country, or the world, looked so eagerly for guidance as during these days when the experience of peace seemed almost dreamlike in its unreality, and one half expected to wake up and find a war on as usual. After the first tumult and shouting of relief had died down, people began to wonder what had really happened, or was going to happen next. It was a bewildering world with all the old, familiar landmarks disappearing, and change taking place so fast and furiously that no one could say where it was going to stop. There was the amazing portent of Holy Russia gone Communist, murdering her royalties and martyring her bishops—and if Russia had fallen, who could feel sure of standing? The German snake had been scotched, but was it killed? for popular opinion had been taught to credit the Hun with Satanic resource and malignity. What sort of an England were the millions returning from the trenches going to find, or demand? And above all, by what means was England going to pluck from the honour and glory of victory fruits of lasting prosperity? Who would now lead God's favoured people, and by what

path, into the Promised Land? And what man was so obviously marked out for such leadership as the wizard statesman who in a few brief months had conjured up victory out of defeat?

It is easy to see now what were the two prime duties of a leader. They were, first to impart to the people the plain truth of the situation, and then to counsel them, with such wisdom as he could command, how to respond to it. Having thus given of his best, he would count, as is the manner of great leaders, on a proportionately noble response. Should that fail, he could at least depart with honour, and give place, for a season, to lesser men.

This, which might have been the way of Pericles or Washington, was hardly likely to be that of Mr. Lloyd George. He was nothing if not a practical politician, and for the practical politician the first and obvious thing to be done with a general election is to win it. And general elections are not won by appealing from Demos drunk to Demos sober, or by supplying unpalatable truth when the demand is for smooth things. Mr. Lloyd George had shown himself capable of ruffling up the spirits of his countrymen, in time of military disaster, with his own invincible optimism, but it requires a different order of courage to put a damper on the spirits of a mob that is prepared to cheer you to the echo.

It is improbable that Mr. Lloyd George was conscious of having taken the most momentous decision of his career. He acted, as he always had acted, by instinct, in playing up to the mood of the hour and making sure of the support of his public by giving it no more, and no less, than that for which it clamoured.

There is a passage in Sir Oliver Lodge's *Raymond* which has come in for a good deal of ridicule, but which is at least true to human nature as we know it on this side of the grave. It is to the effect that the spirits of those killed in battle are often at first so incapable of realizing what has happened, that they want to go on fighting. The bewildered electorate

resembled one of these newly-fused phantoms. Amid so much to which it was hard to adjust its consciousness, it clung to the impulse that had possessed it for these last four years, to go on fighting the Hun even now he was down. It was not enough merely to have won the War, unless you also contrived to win the peace. This journalistic slogan gave form and stimulus to what soon became the reigning obsession. What profit was there in victory, if the Hun should contrive to win back by diplomacy what he had lost in the field? The man in the street could never trust his politicians to see what was as plain as a pikestaff to himself. They must be fingered up, they must be held down, to their task of driving home the victory and securing its fruits.

It was a new and enormously expanded electorate that was about to go to the polls. Amid the excitement of the War, there had been hardly any attention to spare for the passing of the fourth of the series of great Reform Bills, by which the last checks on adult male suffrage had been swept away, and by which all women above the age of thirty were given the vote on the same terms as men. And the women, almost without exception, had been worked up to a mood of hysterical vindictiveness. The feminine instinct demanded punishment; it lusted after a scapegoat, in the shape of the almost mythical Kaiser, with his withered arm and Mephistophelian moustache.

By what means this fury was maintained at boiling point may be judged from an article addressed "To Women, by a Woman," in the December number of *Blackwood's*, a magazine that was supposed to cater for a more or less educated audience. In this terrific document, the spiciest and most hair-raising stories of Hun atrocity are resurrected for page after page, until at last "we women" are exhorted that no German shall in future be so much as allowed to set foot on British soil. "We will not", it shrieks, "allow wild beasts and brutes to come and settle among us and take the place of our dead sons." The shades of a

million "best and bravest" are invoked in due form, and the women, whom they have died to preserve from the aforementioned atrocities, are exhorted to see that their "splendid and heroic devotion" shall not be in vain. Desolate and broken-hearted, they will yet do their part against a foe who, they are warned, will be organized for peace as he was for war, "arrogant, pitiless, selfish, brutal and unchristian." If their own statesmen should fail them, President Wilson, of all people, might be pressed into the service, but if even his knees should prove weak, the women are reminded that they have yet two weapons, in the vote, and in their power to boycott all products of the accursed country. As for the Kaiser, who has caused the death, maiming and torture of millions, he must of course be tried, and, in case the court should be in any doubt as to the requirements of feminine justice, "should assuredly not escape the penalty of death."

That is a not unfavourable specimen of the propaganda that was being bawled, through all the megaphones of the Press, into the ears of a dazed and bewildered public, which was only too ready to believe that the fruits of its wonderful victory were in peril, and that the politicians needed the utmost pressure that could be applied to them. In this it did an injustice to its leaders, who, whatever they may have thought themselves, showed a truly democratic eagerness to take their orders from behind.

Mr. Lloyd George's nature was no doubt to be as generous in victory as he had been indomitable in its pursuit. His first impulse after the Armistice had been to make a gesture that would have proved of untold value in healing the bitterness of war. He discussed with Mr. Churchill the idea of sending a couple of foodships to starving and blockaded Germany. "But we had to realize," he said, "that public hatred against Germany was too intense to have tolerated such a move on our part."<sup>1</sup> The words of the Book, "If thine enemy be a-hungred, feed him," might pass

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unchallenged in a mountain Bethel, but on the hustings one had to think of practical politics. It was the parting of the ways, and by this great refusal of a small mercy the Premier had set his foot upon the broad path of immediate popularity. But on that path his hitherto unfailing good fortune ceased to accompany him. He had touched the highest point of all his greatness, and beyond that the descent, gradual at first, rapidly became precipitous.

There is no need to linger over the crazy auction which got more and more extravagant as polling day drew near. One feels that if Lord Northcliffe and his fellow Press bosses had told the electors to bawl for the moon, Mr. Lloyd George would have promised them the sun—though with some subtly-camouflaged qualification that would cover a subsequent failure to deliver the luminary—that one of his colleagues would promptly have capped him by offering the whole Universe, and that the Press would have started another round by bawling that to limit one's demands to a paltry universe was a betrayal of the glorious Empire, the beloved Sovereign, and the heroic dead. Not only was every consideration of humanity, of honour, and of justice, flung to the winds, but not the least regard was paid to commonsense or probability.

The fact that Germany had laid down her arms on terms of strictly-defined impartiality was conveniently ignored. It is doubtful whether such a thought had entered the mind of the average elector. The peace that he had been worked up to demand was one of vengeance and plunder, and there was no hesitation in assuring him that such a peace would be duly exacted. The limitation to civilian damages was completely ignored; the only question was how much could be screwed out of Germany now, and for generations to come. Mr. Lloyd George declared that she must pay to the uttermost, or we should search her pockets. A fellow Minister who was credited with the practical good sense of a business expert, orated, with a picturesqueness that Shylock



might have envied, about squeezing the lemon till you could hear the pips squeak. Nobody seems to have imagined that it would be any more difficult to obtain unlimited wealth from Germany, than it would be to squeeze lemons or to run through the pockets of a man whom you have stunned with a life-preserver, still less that such a transfer might involve the ruin of the receiver no less than that of the yielder.

The poor, discredited Kaiser was marked out for the rôle of enemy leader in a Roman triumph. He was to be brought to London and done ignominiously to death, after some formality of a mock trial. The only Labour member left in the Cabinet came out loud and bold for hanging him, and, in fact, the slogan of the moment was never "try", but always "hang the Kaiser!" What would have been the precise feelings of George V at the spectacle of his first cousin dangling from a beam after a trial tactfully arranged in the historic precincts of Westminster Hall, or how far he would have approved of the precedent set for future and possibly unsuccessful wars, were questions that no more occurred to his loyal subjects than did that of how to catch the Kaiser. He was in Holland, and by a principle of international law that had been asserted by no nation more stoutly and repeatedly than by Britain herself, his extradition could not be demanded. Were the Allies going to let loose fire and slaughter upon the neighbour of little Belgium, rather than do Mr. Ellis, the hangman, out of a job?

There was also home policy to be considered. Here again Mr. Lloyd George was expansively optimistic. The Government was going on to win the Peace, as it had won the War. A phrase was coined that made just the right appeal to the mood of the moment. It was "homes fit for heroes," a hero being anyone who had volunteered or been conscripted for service at or behind the front. By this was implied that the Government would undertake not only to restore the Pre-war social conditions but

vastly to improve upon them. This was to be done by a programme of reconstruction all round. The spirit and unity that had won the War would be carried on into the peace. The same wizard would be there to conjure up Utopia as he had conjured up victory. There was no hint of the grimmest battle that had ever been fought against hard times and the threat of social disaster.

If the Premier was a wizard, the event of the Polling Day must have reminded him of the fate of that amateur of the black arts who found himself flooded out of the house by the Djinns he had summoned to bring him water, and whom he did not know how to stop bucketing it on the floor. He had bargained, according to his Boswell, Lord Riddell, for a majority of not less than 120. But the coupon candidates, as those were called who were ready to present his Government with what amounted to a political blank cheque, romped home by a majority of more than twice that amount. The Liberal Party, as an independent entity, was almost wiped out, Mr. Asquith and all the principal leaders being thrown out of their seats, and only a miserable twenty-eight returned. The Labour Party managed to raise its Pre-war number to sixty-three, but this highly significant result had been achieved by candidates who had pledged themselves to take it out of Germany with a good patriotic peace. The excited electorate was not prepared to tolerate any sort of pacifist, even if he were so distinguished a leader as Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, Mr. Snowden, or Mr. Henderson.

Had not the title Mad Parliament been already bespoken, it would surely be appropriated by some future historian for this strange assembly. By pretty general consent it ranks on a lower level of thought and competence than any Parliament of modern times. Most of its members represented not a policy, but an emotion. Few of them had much more knowledge of the intricate social problems that they were called upon to solve than can be imparted by the

average public school education, or during the wear and tear of competitive money-making. They included such almost super-patriots as Mr. Pemberton Billing, who had agreeably thrilled the country by his discovery of a Black Book proving half its public men to be monsters of sexual perversion, and the great Horatio Bottomley, now greater than ever, the idol of the common soldier, and not so long before seriously thought of as the destined saviour of his country. But of most of them it is enough to say that they had taken and believed quite seriously the nonsense that they had had to talk from the platform, and that they expected their leader to honour the letter and spirit of what they understood to be his pledges.

Mr. Lloyd George must have realized, too late, how gravely he had miscalculated. He had no doubt counted on putting away the childish things of the platform, and going to Paris with a free hand and mind for the not ungenerous policy to which he was naturally inclined. But these vast hordes that had flocked to his standard held him their prisoner. If he should decide to let Germany off—could he count on their letting him off?

Moreover, the overwhelming majority of his following, a majority even of the Commons, was Conservative—much of it not of the constructive or Disraelian, but of the reactionary or Diehard persuasion. How long would these gentlemen retain the services of the Limehouse Duke-baiter, once he showed signs of breaking away to his native Liberalism?

Mr. Lloyd George was not the only statesman who, by snatching at a petty advantage, had ruined in advance the great task to which destiny had called him, that of laying the foundation of a new and peaceful world order. Wilson, the immaculate philosopher, had failed even more tragically. For whereas Mr. Lloyd George had at least aimed at standing above party and class as the leader of a united nation,

Wilson had failed to rise above the viewpoint of an American party boss. On the eve of the Congressional election, in the very month of the Armistice, he had issued a presidential appeal to all electors to vote for his own, the Democratic, party. That appeal was not even successful, and the balance of power in the Senate, and on its Foreign Relations Committee, tilted in favour of the President's now embittered opponents. And the Senate had an absolute veto on the ratification of any peace that Wilson might honour with his signature.

There was a chance for Wilson to come to terms with the Senate while he was in the way with it; to take it frankly into partnership by bringing one or two of its leading members with him on the voyage he had decided to make to Europe as head of the American Peace Delegation. Nothing of the sort seems to have occurred to him, nor did it occur to anyone in Europe—except perhaps one or two Cambridge men of no importance, who remembered what they had mugged up in their Woodrow Wilson for the first part of their History Tripos—to doubt that what the President said to-day the United States would confirm to-morrow. Perhaps it was as well that Europe did not realize that Wilson might talk and promise as he pleased, but that his engagements were about as likely to be honoured as the cheques of a bankrupt.

The day before Mr. Lloyd George registered his great triumph at the polls, Wilson arrived in Europe for one even greater. In England, in France, in Italy, his leisurely progress was that of a demigod. Curious relics of that time are the *Avenues* and *Places President Wilson* that are a normal feature of French towns. The cult was by no means a monopoly of the Allies. To the Germans the President was a hope and a deliverer, the object of an adulation that was more flattering than dignified. The business of hammering out the Peace terms was delayed, and the hunger blockade of Germany prolonged, for the

performance of these amiable preliminaries, Wilson's austere nature being less disposed than that of the courtier in Voltaire's story, to grow weary at the *refrain* of:

Que sa mérite est extrême !  
Que de grace ! Que de grandeur !  
Ah ! Combien monseigneur  
Doit être content de soi même !

## CHAPTER V

### RESTORATION

The first fine careless rapture of victory was at least strong enough to last out the year. The sheer consciousness of relief from anticipation of the War Office telegram that seemed bound sooner or later to arrive, from the terror by night and terror by day of air raids, from the ultimate and unspoken fear that the end might *not* be victory but collapse and ruin, was enough to keep alive the feeling of thankfulness without too critical an examination of blessings received.

But one cannot feed the spirits permanently on mere belief, and with the coming of the new year dawned also the consciousness of what a bleak and wintry prospect lay before even those who esteemed themselves victors. The War was over, but its privations and discomforts seemed destined to survive it for a time that no one could foresee. The prime necessities of life were still doled out according to each person's ration card, and its amenities were cut to the bone by the abhorred shears of Dora, or the Defence of the Realm Act, a form of domestic martial law that seemed destined to become one of the permanent horrors of peace. The price of everything, from food to cosmetics, had soared to heights undreamed of in the worst Pre-war nightmares, and the tendency was still to rise. And even where there was the money to buy, before it could go to the shops the clutching hand of the tax-collector had grabbed a quarter, or a third, or even more.

Thousands of families, that had been in comfort-

able circumstances before the War, found themselves plunged in the depths of poverty. The class hit hardest of all was that of people whose incomes ranged from about £300 to £500 a year. This was beginning to be stunted in the Press as that of the new poor. On the other hand, the wage-earning class, whose services, during the War, had been in such urgent and vital demand, had succeeded in altering the balance of distribution so much in its own favour, that wages, on the whole, had more than kept pace with the rise in prices. This economic lopsidedness was fraught with the certainty of convulsive struggles before Capital and Labour had adjusted their relations, and the first mutterings of the storm were already audible.

Meanwhile the prospect beyond the British shores was hardly calculated to sustain the enthusiasm of victory. In more than one part of the world the habit of killing seemed to have become chronic. In the vast, tortured expanse of Russia the miseries of civil war were plainly destined to supplement those of famine and Red revolution. A British army, condemned to the darkness and cold of an Arctic winter, was engaged in a war of its own, whose purpose was not particularly evident to the plain man, against one of England's former allies. The hitherto inviolate Berlin was the scene of savage fighting between German and German, culminating in the brutal murder of the Red leaders, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. In the East, the victory of the Allies had awakened stirrings of a Nationalism that threatened to become militant, while Catholic Ireland had formally broken loose from any idea of partnership with England, and her elected representatives, shaking the dust of Westminster from off their feet, were about to constitute themselves the governing body of a nation determined to achieve independence by any means. Even at Paris, where the Conference was an unconscionable time getting itself started, there were rumours that the proceedings might not

be marked by that heavenly harmony which had been popularly supposed to sweeten the intercourse of the Allies.

Last but not least, the Angel of Death had not ceased to stalk the land. It was one thing to stop the War, it was another to cry halt to the plague that the War had brought in its train and which, for want of a better name, was roped in under the comprehensive heading of influenza, a frightful scourge that had reached its peak in the autumn, and which came not far from doubling the total death roll of the War all over the world. By the New Year the wave had subsided into a comparative trough, only to rise to a crest again in March. But all through the winter the germs were in active circulation, and many a young soldier, who had defied all the probabilities by surviving the missiles and poison of the enemy, was ignobly put out of the way by the hordes of streptococci and pneumococci for whose advance the influenza germ served as a preliminary barrage.

Even in the victorious armies, all was not well. So long as it had been a question of sticking it out against the enemy in the field, the British army had been the only one among those of the combatant nations whose spirit had never showed the least sign of breaking or revolting. But now that the enemy himself was apparently broken, Thomas Atkins had become a workman who was being kept away from his job, and was not unreasonably afraid of losing it altogether, on the principle of "first come, first served." Relying, not in vain, on the effects of the hunger blockade, Britain had begun to demobilize her army with such headlong expedition that by the end of January something like a million men had been returned to civilian life. But even this was not fast enough for those who felt the release of their mates an aggravation of their own grievance. It was almost too much to expect that such an immense task would be accomplished with perfect tact and smoothness. In their anxiety to release the workers in such an



order as to keep the economic machine working with a minimum of friction, the authorities were apt to discharge newly-joined conscripts who happened to be key men, in preference to volunteer veterans who had borne the burden and heat of the day. They were doing their best with a job of terrible difficulty, and they were bound to make mistakes. But the wildest rumours were put into circulation. The politicians, who, as a class, were assumed to be capable of any villainy, were accused of keeping the men with the colours because they were afraid of having them back in the country. It was Mr. Lloyd George, who was prompted by International Finance, or the Jews, or, still more mysteriously, by the Hidden Hand. Meanwhile those very newspapers of the Trust Press that were for imposing the most monstrous terms upon the enemy, were characteristically bawling for the immediate disbandment of the army which alone could apply the argument for their acceptance.

Accordingly the process of demobilization was marked by some ugly incidents, and on one or two occasions by the manifestation of a spirit, unknown during the War, of mutiny, tentative and half-hearted, but capable of spreading like a prairie fire if there had been either violence or ostensible weakness in dealing with it. Happily there was neither. There was a moment at Calais when a mob of mutineers was obstinately confronting a line of fixed bayonets interspersed with machine guns, and when, as Mr. Churchill says, "a shocking explosion would have been precipitated by a single shot."<sup>1</sup> But that shot was never fired, and discipline triumphed without bloodshed. The grievances, once realized, were taken in hand, and, during the next few months, the business of unloading the khaki millions on the civilian labour market got accomplished with less friction than had at one time seemed probable.

The year 1919 was not far advanced before a good part of the gilt had been rubbed off the gingerbread

<sup>1</sup> *World Crisis*, Vol. 5, p. 62.

of victory. It was anything but a cheerful prospect that was coming into view on the far side of Armageddon. The most significant of all changes was one not of wealth or material comfort, but of mind and spirit. This was particularly apparent to anyone returning to England at the beginning of 1919 from some part of the world, like India, where life had run more or less in the Pre-war grooves. The face of the countryside, after all that one had read about grubbed woods and temporary buildings, was almost startlingly the same. It was the people who were different. It was like coming back to an enormously expanded nerve hospital, or, to put it in the language of the War, as if the majority of people had become afflicted with a form of shell-shock. Feverish excitement alternated with morbid irritability. Reactions appeared to have become hectic to an extent never dreamed of before 1914.

This state of mind found expression in a mood of almost agonizing gaiety, an attempt to carry on, in time of peace, the spirit of the war leave, which had so often been a pathetic attempt to cram into a few hours the zest and pleasure of a lifetime. Even the soaring prices and the new poverty were disregarded—the War had broken the habit of thinking and planning for the morrow. At all costs one must purchase forgetfulness; the need was imperative for an atmosphere as different as possible from the haunted gloom of war-time routine.

One symptom of this reaction was the most impassioned cult of dancing that had been witnessed in England, since the fall of the Puritan usurpation had set the whole country footing it round maypoles. All classes alike shared in it. Night clubs had now become an established feature of London life, and, in varying degrees of respectability, were everywhere springing up in answer to the demand. A touch of lawlessness was not infrequently added to their attraction—the loathly Dora would be flouted by the sale of grossly overpriced liquors at prohibited hours,

and there might be the excitement of a police raid, and even the thrill of an appearance before a magistrate in circumstances deemed the reverse of humiliating. There were the humbler halls where the clerk or shop assistant could take his best girl, or failing a girl of his own, obtain a professional partner at a modest fee.

The music was of a kind that could have only been desired or endured in a time of neurotic reaction from war strain. The pre-war ragtime had now definitely given place to jazz, with *plantation comedy* no longer its inspiring spirit, but the naked savagery of the jungle. A crashing and almost tuneless cacaphony was sought and achieved by the most fashionable bands, as if they were trying to give the most accurate possible reproduction of a barrage before zero hour. Tin trays, fire irons and similar deafening adjuncts were conscripted in the service of Terpsichore.

The dress of the female dancers was in keeping. It was the new fashion to expose as much of the upper part of the body as possible, and it was becoming chic to leave the shoulders and armpits completely uncovered. A corresponding frankness, hitherto reserved for schoolgirls, ruled below the knee. There was none of the romantic suggestiveness that had emphasized the bosoms of young ladies in the sixties, nor even the rather grotesque invitation of the later bustle. It was the nakedness not of sensuality, but of a brutally direct assertion. Young womanhood, freshly demobilized for the most part, was out to capture and enjoy the pleasure of the moment on a footing of comradeship with the male, and no nonsense or false modesty about it.

As for money, there was still a good deal to throw about. There were arrears of pay and war bonuses, and there were above all the profits that had been harvested so easily during the War as to earn for their reapers the invidious new name of profiteers. The profiteer did, as a matter of fact, come in for a good deal of quite unreasonable condemnation. It was not his fault that human lives should have been

conscripted for the service of the State, and wealth left to compete with other wealth for whatever reward it could exact from the community. Under these conditions, with prices rising and demand everywhere outrunning supply, it was impossible to prevent profits from dropping like Danae's shower into the lap of every business man who was fairly doing his bit.

How could these lucky winners of large or small fortunes, many of them destined to go as lightly as they had come, be expected to show the tact and taste in expenditure that comes from generations of breeding? To most of them wealth had all the fascination of a romance. It was sweet and glorious to be "Sir" to a real butler of one's own or even a caddy on the golf links, and it was very heaven to ride, perhaps a little unsteadily, to the meet, and be "good-morninged" by the Master with the *bonhomie* reserved for important subscribers. For Mrs. Profiteer, no outlay on charities was too heavy for the privilege of being admitted to the less intimate parties of dear but impecunious Lady So-and-so, or even of capturing for her daughter the not altogether disinterested affections of Lady So-and-so's still more impecunious son.

But though quite a number of profiteers had big enough hearts to cover a multitude of social deficiencies, it could not be but that the survivors in a struggle for wealth should include a proportion of vulgar egotists, in the worst sense of both words, and when these people flung themselves and their money into the wild pleasure hunt that was the reaction from the War, the results were not only unlovely to a degree, but mischievous out of all proportion to their real numbers and importance. Their exploits lost nothing in the telling, and were diligently struted in the Press. To the returning soldiers the yells of laughter and popping of champagne corks contrasted insolently with their own drab circumstances and doubtful prospects. Was it for benefit of these drones that the

War had been endured and won? It was only too easy to assume that all of what was vaguely known as the Capitalist class was tarred with the same brush. A similar line of reasoning had led to startling conclusions in Russia.

Whatever seeds of racial bitterness were being sown were still no more than germinating. For the moment the compelling urge was to forget that there had ever been such a thing as a war on—to live for the moment and intoxicate oneself into make-believe that the piping times were back and the spirit of good King Edward presiding over the self-styled “Naughty Nineteens.”

## CHAPTER VI

### SEVENTH BEATITUDE

Often the most important things in history are those that never happen, and sometimes those that never could happen. This was certainly true of the Paris Peace Conference. The only logical and honourable sequel to the Armistice would have been the setting up of some impartial tribunal, such as a board of neutral jurists, to translate those principles of peace, by which the Allies had purchased Germany's surrender, clause by clause, into the detail of a treaty. The bill for civilian damages, that Germany had agreed to pay, could have been assessed at the same time by an equally impartial board of experts. Whether in their own, or the common interest, it would then have been advisable for the victors to press for the uttermost farthing, might have been a question of expediency, or of morals, but honour, if it were only the honour of Shylock, would have been safe.

It throws a queer light on civilized ethics that it should not have occurred to the author of the Points and Principles, or even to the Germans themselves, that such procedure could be practical politics. Whatever differences separated the Allies, none of them had the least doubt that it was their privilege, as victors, to be judges of their own cause, and sole interpreters of their own covenanted principles. From this the transition was humanly inevitable to ignoring such principles altogether in practice, except in so far as a certain lip homage might be necessary to salve conscience or self-esteem.

But to talk as if it were simply a matter of the Allies, symbolized as some great, corporate personality, imposing their terms on a beaten enemy, would be to simplify matters beyond all warrant. They were even more actively concerned, through their representatives at the Conference, in imposing terms upon each other. One and all were wedded to the principle of self first, and devil take the hindmost. Everyone of the statesman who went to Paris knew that he was there as an advocate speaking to the brief of an exacting and greedy client, who cared less than nothing for humanity at large or the building of a new world order, or indeed for anything whatever except what he could get grabbed for him out of the general scramble. It is easy to see how this was bound to work out, in practice, at the expense of an enemy who was assumed to be helpless. Each party to the share-out would find himself in a position to purchase the assent of the others to the utmost of his own demands by the simple process of presenting them with cheques drawn on that enemy's account. Nor would any one of them, having got what he himself wanted, have more than a Platonic interest in the question whether these cheques would, or could eventually be honoured. And as each would be solely concerned with fixing his own claim at the highest possible figure, the mathematical result would be to fix the demands on Germany at some fantastically inflated figure that might, for all practical purposes, be written down infinity.

Even the Alliance was an anarchy of egotism, and even anarchy is subject to the law of its own nature. No conscious contrivance was needed to make a peace, hammered out under such auspices, degenerate into one that, if any individual despot or government had framed it, could only have been described as insane in its ruthlessness and cupidity. And this in spite of the fact that the delegates at Paris commanded the services of the most brilliant experts that their respective nations contained, and that the

individual statesmen almost certainly stood on a higher moral level than the Metternichs and Talleyrands, the Catherines and Fredericks, of the old diplomacy.

Those who have read the accounts of former peace conferences will not need to be reminded of the long elaborate negotiations, and the still more elaborate courtesies and punctilio, between the plenipotentiaries of two sides whose armies might still be contending in the field. There was no nonsense of this kind at Paris. There were certainly long months of bargaining, as hard and complicated as any recorded in diplomatic history, but it was between the victor nations themselves, and the enemy had only to wait and starve till the result of the haggling was presented for his signature.

Here again it was no matter of conscious contrivance. Mr. Harold Nicolson, in what is certainly the most illuminating of all the many studies of the Conference, has shown how the Allies drifted, rather than steered, on to this course. But the current was setting so strongly as to make the drift irresistible. The jigsaw of claims and counter claims, of adjustments and compensations, could never have got itself completed this side of Doomsday if the pattern had been subject to a negotiated revision. Each concession to the enemy would mean some ally sacrificing part of a hard-driven bargain with a fellow-ally. And that would have involved throwing the whole Treaty into the melting-pot, since it was a first principle of patriotic statesmanship to concede nothing without exacting something more than its equivalent from other parties to the transaction. Thus the logic of international anarchy would appear to have admitted of no other working solution of the Conference problem, than that of a peace negotiated by the victors themselves for the vanquished, pistol at forehead, to swallow whole and instantly.

No better safeguard could have been devised against the intrusion of any redeeming chivalry into the



peacemaking activities of the delegates, than the choice of Paris for their place of assembly. None of the Allies, with the doubtful exception of Belgium, could vie with France in the implacability of her hatred for Germany, nor in the subconscious intensity of the fear by which that hatred was fed. Even before the War, the iron of invasion had bitten deep into the French soul, and nerves were always on edge with apprehension lest the terrible visitor of 1814 and 1870 should be destined to return. And return he had, more terrible than ever! So now that he was down and vanquished, he must be crushed and his menace removed. About that all France felt as one man, and of France, Paris was the brain. There is no city so capable of imposing a hypnotic spell on her guests. One could never feel impartial there, as one might have felt at Geneva or The Hague. The atmosphere was electric with victory—and revenge.

It was France that set the tone of the Conference, if only for the reason that her chief spokesman, Clemenceau, knew precisely what he and France wanted, and bent all his energies, with single-minded lucidity, to its attainment. Now that Germany was down, she must never be allowed to rise—she must be bled white, for generations to come, and the sword struck out of her hand forever. If she could be profitably exploited in the process—so much the better! But tribute was a by-product of victory; it must always be safety first. The great fear must never be allowed to return—never again. Clemenceau's sentiments towards Germany were in no way different from those of the elder Cato towards Carthage.

This simplicity of aim gave him an initial advantage over his two great colleagues and rivals, the American President and the British Premier. For Wilson in his academic, and Mr. Lloyd George in his intuitive way, were each capable of a vision transcending the limits of national egotism within which all other

horizons at the Conference were contained. The one envisaged the coming of a new world order from which war should be excluded ; the other had dreamed of the War as one that should end war, and yearned, with the nobler side of his nature, after a peace that should make the dream come true. But neither was capable of the exclusive concentration on the larger, that Clemenceau could devote to the narrower aim. Besides being visionaries, they were patriots, they were politicians, and they were all too human men of their age. Their faith was not of the sort that moves mountains, and nothing less was required, at this hour of destiny, to make the world safe for civilization.

Moreover each, before coming to the Conference, had made the fatal surrender of his own ideal, that had raised up behind Wilson the power of a hostile Senate, and had crippled Mr. Lloyd George with the support of a Mad Parliament.

## CHAPTER VII

### LEADERS IN CHAINS

Out of such a witch's cauldron of conflicting egotisms, only a miracle could have conjured up a settlement capable of healing the ravages of war, and serving as an antidote to future wars. But no miracle was forthcoming. It was not the idealism of Wilson nor the better impulses of Mr. Lloyd George that set the tone of the Conference, but the disillusioned realism of its aged president, Clemenceau, not inaptly nicknamed the Tiger, after the most ruthless, but also the most suspicious and fear-obsessed inhabitant of the jungle.

He went about his work with consummate skill. He may or may not have remembered how, at the Congress of Vienna after the fall of Napoleon, England had put herself in an impregnable moral position by sacrificing colonial and territorial spoils that might have been hers for the asking, in order to get the slave trade abolished. He was, at any rate, resolved that John Bull should have no excuse for riding the moral high horse upon this occasion. Mr. Lloyd George had come plainly commissioned to get all he could for his client out of the general scramble. He was backed by a team of patriots who—not even excepting the aloof and sceptical Arthur Balfour—were there for the straightforward purpose of playing the game for their side. The Tiger was blandly solicitous to invite Mr. Bull to help himself first. As Mr. Keynes has pointed out, "the principal British war aims (with the exception of the Indemnity, if this was one of them) were dealt with in the earliest

stages.”<sup>1</sup> Unless Wilson was to start by quarrelling openly with his two principal allies, he had to reconcile his conscience to the belief that his sacred principles could be stretched thus far without actually breaking, a process by which their elasticity was destined to be continuously increased. And as for John Bull, it would have demanded a more than ordinary measure even of his traditional cant for him to have pocketed his own share of the spoils, and then turned round on his loyal partner with heaven-raised eyes and a reference to the Eighth Commandment.

And so the haggle was started whose issue was in one of the most fatal settlements ever devised by man. It could be in no sense a planned arrangement—it was in fact the net product of a number of jarring and conflicting purposes. The only expedient on which everyone could be trusted to agree was that of piling burdens on the enemy without stint or mercy, because this was always the line of easiest exit out of any disputed situation. Nobody was ready to sacrifice himself, but nobody had any serious hesitation in sacrificing the Hun. That this might involve a sacrifice of honour was one of those things on which it was not tactful to insist. At a very early stage in the proceedings there was a tacit agreement to ignore the fact that the Armistice had been granted on conditions. Even to Wilson the Points, Principles and Particulars had ceased to be much more than a harmless incantation, capable of being chanted, like a doxology, after each fresh clause that was added to the Treaty.

He, the professor turned politician, was soon hopelessly out of his depth amid these cross-currents of intrigue. He was at once a greater and a lesser man than the nimbler-witted worldings with whom he had to cope. They were incapable of rising to his lofty disinterestedness, and planning not only for their nation and the moment, but for humanity and the future. He was incapable of keeping pace

<sup>1</sup> *Essays in Biography*, p. 37.

or touch with mental processes so much quicker and more adaptable than his own. He was perpetually on the verge of putting down his foot, of rising in his presidential majesty with a "thus far shalt thou go and no further." He would pack up and take train to Brest, where the *George Washington* was waiting to take him back to New York. He would wash his own hands, and America's, of these unworthy squabbles, and leave the Allies to stew in their own juice.

Unfortunately events, and his colleagues, were always a little too quick for him. Before he had quite made up his mind that the decisive moment had come, the immediate crisis would have passed; some verbal sleight of hand would have been effected, and while he was still trying to make up his mind whether there was really a catch in it, the trick would have been gathered and the next round have started. And when at last the President did resolve to assert himself, it was against Italy, whose part in the peacemaking was as grasping and disingenuous as her part in the War had been undistinguished. He was simple enough to appeal over the heads of her accredited representatives, to the presumably disinterested sentiments of the Italian people, who had so recently fêted him as if he had been another Cæsar. The foot had come down at last—in a ghastly *faux pas*. It was not Wilson, but the Italian Premier, who scuttled away from the Conference in a state of virtuous and voluble indignation. Sacred egotism rose to a chorus of shrieking protest—the Roman mob would gladly have pushed their strange mentor over the Tarpeian Rock, if they could have got at him. And presently, interest in their proceedings having died down, the Italians returned to Paris a little exhausted from the war dance, but ostentatiously unrepentant. But Wilson did nothing more—there being nothing very obvious for him to do.

He was bewildered, outmanœuvred at every turn by men whom he could not but feel to be incapable

of appreciating his motives or sharing his vision. The Peace whose principles he had so carefully defined, and so triumphantly imposed, was slipping out of his hands, and becoming one of naked vengeance and plunder. All he could do was to stand by, asserting to himself and others that every day and in every way his virtue remained inviolate, that his principles only needed to be rightly understood to be reconciled with his concessions to expediency. To that assertion he clung, with a drowning man's grip. It was the last support of his self-esteem, and as it grew less plausible, so did the fury of his resentment increase against anyone who dared question it.

But however much his personality may have failed to rise to the requirements of the situation, Woodrow Wilson never played false to the ideal that it had been the purpose of his mission to realize. Never did any man keep his eyes more steadfastly on a distant goal. He could reconcile his conscience to almost any means that would lead to this end. And he could afford to accept defeat on a thousand points of detail, provided that the supreme object was not sacrificed. Let these little men have their way with their colonies and frontiers, their punishments and indemnities! There was no permanence in these things; such arrangements in their very nature must be subject to revision. But by binding all the nations of the world into a League, he was providing an instrument that would in time be capable of mending or ending these concessions to an outdated Nationalism. Nothing was lost if the League was only preserved—the League, America's supreme contribution to the new order of civilization. That America herself would leave him in the lurch and repudiate the League was a possibility that does not seem to have occurred to the President.

Mr. Lloyd George was not, like Wilson, a philosopher. His trust was in the wizardry of intuition that had never yet failed to provide him with a solution for the problem of the moment. For the future, God or good fortune would provide. This gave

him a suppleness and resource that Wilson lacked. No fear of inconsistency would warp his judgment or cramp his style in any given situation. There can be no doubt that he had come to Paris determined to put behind him the froth and fury of his election speeches, and to give his statesmanlike instincts free play in the framing of the Peace. He had even, as Sir Austen Chamberlain's memoirs now reveal, proposed to disembarrass himself of the control of his own Cabinet and to take to Paris for himself and his dependable second string, Bonar Law, the Conservative leader, powers practically dictatorial—a dose that proved a little too strong for his colleagues to swallow.

It was an unrecognizably different Mr. Lloyd George from the Kaiser-hanger and last-farthing-extractor of the previous December, who submitted to his fellow negotiators, on March 25, a plea for an impartial and dispassionate peace, one that Germany could sign with a reasonable hope of fulfilment, and that would not sow the seeds of a future war. He would have admitted her at once to the League of Nations, and imposed on her no scheme of disarmament which the Allies were not prepared to accept for themselves. It is a document whose statesmanlike quality the experience of the ensuing years has served only to confirm.

But it may be too late to embrace wisdom when you are legally contracted to her opposite. Once let Mr. Lloyd George show the least sign of receding from the letter or spirit of his election commitments, and there were hundreds of his supporters in the Commons who would demand to know the reason why. It might have been possible for him to have joined forces with Wilson, in a successful effort to implement their even more explicit and formal pledges to Germany, had the secrets of the Conference been properly kept. But they were not kept, nor would it have suited the book of grim old Clemenceau that they should have been. Still less would it have

accorded with the wishes of the one man in all England who wielded a power capable of challenging that of the Premier.

It would be easier to extract a moral from history, if the gods confined themselves to the vices or follies of men in forging instruments to plague them. But truth compels us to recognize that it was an act, or rather omission, of courage and high principle, from whose effects the Premier found it hardest to shake himself free. When he had effected the *coup* that had hurled Asquith from power, he had owed no small part of his success to the goodwill of the Press, and particularly that controlled by Lord Northcliffe. But his Lordship, whose megalomania was shortly to assume a tragic form, had set his heart on being one of the delegates at the Peace Conference, and had probably never doubted that his known wish would be law to Mr. Lloyd George. If so, he had misjudged his man. The Premier, who was the last man to accept dictation, simply ignored him. It was a rebuff that Northcliffe never forgave. All Hell should stir for this, and no man was more of an adept in raising Hell than the great newspaper magnate. He flung to the winds the last shreds of such responsibility as he might have felt as a delegate. From henceforth he had no thought but to pursue the Premier like a fury of avenging patriotism. The engines of mass suggestion were set working at full blast. Let Germany be destroyed, plundered, punished, trampled underfoot, and if Mr. Lloyd George showed slackness in the good work, let him be kicked out and give place to better Englishmen.

It was early in April that matters came to a crisis. The persistent newspaper campaign had by this time thoroughly alarmed Mr. Lloyd George's supporters in Parliament. A certain Colonel Claude Lowther pointed out, with literal truth, that Members had promised their constituents to extract the uttermost farthing from Germany, in the simple faith that the enemy countries would be able to foot the whole



of the Allied war bill, and a week later no less than 370 M.P.'s put their names to a telegram inviting the Premier's attention to persistent reports, that instead of formulating the complete claims of the Empire, he was merely considering what could be extracted from the enemy. That he should consider such a thing at all was obviously to these worthy and presumably sane legislators, little short of treason.

But the spirit that had not quailed before the submarine blockade and the March offensive was not so easily broken. Mr. Lloyd George returned from Paris to defend his policy in one of the most memorable fighting speeches of his career. Casting discretion to the winds, he let loose a torrent of flaming and contemptuous invective on the man who could sway the minds—or mindlessness—of millions. This was a very different matter from baiting a few rather comical Dukes. He was challenging a power impalpable, all-pervasive, and capable of wearing down even the loftiest prestige; the power that had deprived the country of the services of Haldane and reduced Kitchener to discredited impotence. And Mr. Lloyd George was careful to affront it beyond all possibility of forgiveness.

Into a few scathing sentences he condensed what a Strachey might have expanded into a full length biography. He showed Northcliffe deluding himself and all the people he ever permitted to go near him into the belief that he was the only man who could win the War, and waiting for the clamour of the multitude to call him to direct the destinies of nations. Not a whisper! Not a sound! The War is won without him! But then—his satellites inform him—he is at any rate the only man capable of making a peace. So he publishes his own peace terms and waits for the call. He retires to sunny climes and still waits, "but not a sound reaches that far distant shore to call him to his great task of saving the world."

So far the satire has been in a vein of exuberant, almost playful humour. But now Mr. Lloyd George

risks to a note of flaming rebuke and indignation. "When," he cries, "this kind of disease of vanity is carried to the point of sowing dissension of great allies whose unity is essential to the peace and happiness of the world . . . then, I say that not even this kind of disease is a justification for so black a crime against humanity."

It was a brave and magnificent defiance. And for an improvised expedient—as all Mr. Lloyd George's expedients were improvised—it was masterly. The best possible way of discrediting suggestion is to force its promoter into the open and have it out with him above board. But time fought upon the side of Lord Northcliffe. He had only to give the word to start the most tremendous machinery of mass suggestion ever devised, working continuously in the service of his vendetta. From now onwards the Premier would get the credit of *none* of his good deeds, and every mistake and indiscretion he committed would be pilloried and magnified. By a thousand inuendoes it would be conveyed to the public that he was a pro-German and a humbug, of whom the Empire and the Conservative Party would be well rid. Nothing that he did, or ever would do in the future, would be right. The thunders of Printing House Square would blend with the megaphones of Fleet Street, and these again with the purlings of the gutter. In all of them the public would hear one message, repeated with every variation of definiteness and emphasis—"Lloyd George must go!"

And meanwhile Mr. Lloyd George, having for the moment secured his home front by his tremendous trouncing of the arch mischief-maker, returned to Paris to infuse such sanity into the Treaty as his pledges and followers would allow. But his moral position was as fatally compromised as that of Wilson. It would be as much as his Premiership was worth to allow the least suspicion to rest on the integrity of his patriotism. And Mr. Lloyd George for all his brilliance was hardly of the stuff of which martyrs are made.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THEY CALL IT PEACE

The Treaty to be imposed on Germany was finally patched up for presentation early in May, and was shortly to be followed by others for Austria and Hungary. These documents are, taken together, probably the most fateful on historic record. And it is impossible to arrive at any understanding of the course of subsequent events, unless we have first grasped what eventually it was that they actually settled.

First of all we must avoid thinking of the Treaties, and particularly the one with Germany, as if they were informed by any one conscious or deliberate purpose. It would be strictly true to say that they were not planned documents at all, but the result, unforeseen by anyone, of a number of conflicting and contradictory plans. Nothing would be more easy or plausible than to simplify the story by saying that the Allies, having persuaded Germany to surrender on certain conditions, cynically repudiated them, and proceeded to take advantage of her helplessness to crush and plunder her. This was no doubt the effect of their proceedings, but not, almost and altogether, their intention. The results of anarchy are not planned—they just happen that way.

If any one of the High Contracting Powers had been allowed to draft the settlement without interference from the others, and if the leading representative of that Power had been given a free hand by his own people, civilization would at least have had something definite and intelligible to build upon.

Wilson would no doubt have safeguarded America's supremacy in the New World and her right to trade with future belligerents in, and levy the full covenanted tribute from ex-belligerents in the Old—but he would have also tried to establish a settlement of real justice and permanence under the ægis of a World-League. Mr. Lloyd George would have got all he could for the Empire, but he would also have had the sense to recognize that the peace and prosperity of the Empire could only be secured by putting Germany on her feet again as a customer, and coming to fair terms with her as a neighbour. Clemenceau would have aimed at making it impossible for Germany to recover either her strength or her trade, and at putting France in a position of such unchallengeable supremacy as to secure the peace of Europe for generations to come. Any one of these plans would have had a better chance of succeeding than the quite illogical compromise between these and others that was embodied in the actual Treaties.

Everybody could, as a matter of fact, go home claiming to have secured the full fruits of victory, until you examined the fruit, and found that it was rotten at the core. Wilson had triumphantly embodied, in the Treaty itself, a Covenant binding the nations together in a League of peace and free co-operation, and evoking a new world order out of anarchy. This was to be America's specific contribution to the settlement, one that only her power and prestige could have forced upon her fellow victors—and it was America that was to paralyse the whole scheme by dishonouring her President's signature. This, and the refusal to follow Mr. Lloyd George's advice and include Germany, ensured that the League, whose whole success depended on the spirit informing it, should start under a crippling handicap. Even so, the President could fairly claim, at the bar of history, to have created, in his League, the one practical alternative to the anarchy of nations, and consequently the last hope of saving civilization

from the inevitable, and fatal, consequences of that anarchy. Had he been as great in bringing the idea to birth as he had been in its conception, the hope to-day might have been less forlorn.

Clemenceau, on his side, had equally the appearance of having secured his country's triumph. France found herself dominating the Continent in a way that Napoleon might have envied. Germany was not only disarmed, but subjected for generations to come to a tribute so enormous that even the Treaty was not able to limit the final figure. And to France's now overwhelming army were added those of a ring of allies, new states that had as much reason as she herself to fear the consequences of a German recovery.

But nobody was more capable than the old Tiger of appreciating the fact that France's position was bound to develop elements of insecurity that might, in time, be fraught with a deadlier peril than that of 1914. Even the blockade and loss of territory would leave Germany with an enormous and increasing superiority in man-power, and a far greater capacity for exploiting the powers of a machine age. Even the loss of a few million disloyal Poles and Alsatians might be compensated for by the fact that the Austrians, now hopelessly cut off from their Slav and Magyar connections, had now no way to look but towards union with their German brethren. It is true that a clause had been formally inserted into the Treaty binding them to be free, however much they wanted not to be. But would such a clause be more effective, in the long run, against the will of both peoples, than one commanding the Danube to flow North-West instead of South-East?

In spite of the intransigent ruthlessness of her Nationalism, France was emphatically what Bismarck would have called a saturated power. She had no lust for territory—what the average French citizen desired above all other benefits was security, the right to sleep quietly in his bed without his slumbers being

disturbed by the nightmare of spiked helmets out of the East. And his military chiefs, including the great Foch, were convinced that security could only be assured by making the occupation of the Rhine permanent. Behind that strong barrier the French armies could dig themselves in beyond any possibility of being dislodged. There was no need for France to complicate her domestic politics by adding a number of German departments to the Republic. It had been part of her original and secret war aims to create a nominally independent state on the model of Napoleon's Confederation of the Rhine—a Protectorate of Gaul over Teuton. There were other influences at work of a less acknowledgeable order—financial and manufacturing interests, with powerful newspaper support, that wanted to heat the newly recovered iron of Alsace with coal from the Ruhr, and to form the industrial Rhineland into a single unit under French control.

It was, from the English and American standpoints, a monstrous outrage on every principle and interest for which both nations stood, that France should set up a military dictatorship of this kind, with the certainty of implanting in every German breast an inextinguishable desire to free the lost provinces. But the French were firmly established in the Rhine, and there at a pinch they would have been capable of sitting tight, and allowing their Anglo-Saxon comrades to go home if they chose. France must be bought out of her Rhineland claim by a guarantee of even greater security—and the guarantee was forthcoming. The signature of the Treaty with Germany was accompanied by that of another in which England and America jointly undertook the defence of France against any future German aggression. And on that explicit understanding France consented to drop her claim to more than a temporary occupation of the Rhineland. In the sequel, after the claim had been abandoned beyond any possibility of revival, the French were to discover that

they, like the Germans at the Armistice, had been the victims of a confidence trick.

It must be acknowledged that the authors of the Versailles Treaty did make the greatest effort ever known to give effect to the right of peoples to choose their own governments. Even to Germany, France's claim to dominate the Rhineland having been once shelved, the principle was applied with reasonable fairness. Doubtful cases were submitted to the decision of plebiscites. It would have seemed incredible, before the War, that the political boundaries of Europe could ever be made to correspond so closely with those of race and national sentiment. The most bitterly disputed part of the settlement, the corridor giving a resurrected Poland access to the sea, was not only in strict accordance with Wilson's relevant Point, but it was putting back the map to something like its appearance before Prussia had, in Frederick the Great's frightful simile, partaken of the sacrament of Poland's body. It was the Italian part of the settlement that cynically violated the principle of nationality by the enslavement, for strategic reasons, of the Southern Tyrol, not to speak of considerable numbers of Jugo-Slavs. But the entry of Italy into the War had been purchased by promises that England and France did *not* feel able to repudiate openly, and the Tyrolese mountaineers, the most freedom-loving people in Europe, were accordingly doomed to lose their very names, and almost the right to call their souls their own.

But the very honesty with which the principle of national self-determination was, on the whole, applied, revealed the fact that under the existing system of international anarchy it never could be applied with anything like thoroughness. This was a thing that had never been thought out by the advocates of old-fashioned Liberalism. As long as every state is sovereign within its own frontiers, by no conceivable apportionment of territory can you prevent the arbitrary tyranny of one breed over another, a tyranny

that becomes most acute of all under the forms of democracy. There is the leading instance of that age-long victim, the Jew. And now, not one of the newly enfranchised nations but lusted after exercising a tyranny as bad as, or worse than, that from which it had been delivered, and passing on the kick to the minorities within its gates, not to speak of expanding its frontiers and sovereignty as far as practicable beyond their national limits. And of course, in drawing the frontiers, in all doubtful cases—where plebiscites were barred—the decision was *in favour of the side supposed to be friendly to the Allies.*

The results were lamentable. The Magyars, the worst bullies in Europe, now had the experience of being bullied themselves by neighbours who had many a score to settle with such of the conquering breed as were left at their disposal; Czechs fell with gusto to the task of taking it out of Germans; Poles lost no time in showing that they could better the instruction of their former masters in dealing with enslaved peoples. It is true that the Treaties did make some formal provision for the rights of minorities in the new states, but this was fiercely resented and cynically disregarded in practice. The fact is that under a system, or anarchy, of independent sovereignties, such festering sores in the body of civilization were bound to occur, and could by no possibility be healed. And any one of them might set up a gangrene, mortifying the whole system.

The most openly indefensible part of the Treaty was that concerned with Reparations. How inevitably the policy of piling burdens on Germany had come to be adopted, as the line of least resistance in all disputed cases, we have seen. But the bill finally presented—or rather adumbrated—in the Treaty outran the most fantastic limits of commonsense and common honesty. Few fraudulent tradesmen would be capable of quite such cynicism as that of including in an account for civilian damages the little item of



pensions for soldiers and their dependents. After all, the poor fellows were civilians once, or could have been civilians now, or . . . at any rate if the account were not paid on the nail, the bums would be put in. "Logic! logic!" had been the words of the President, as reported by Mr. Lamont, one of the American delegates, "I don't care a damn for logic. I am going to include pensions."<sup>1</sup> It would have been more honest to have substituted "honesty" for "logic". It mattered little by what form of verbal eyewash it was justified—the effect was that Germany was to pay so huge an indemnity that no sum could possibly be fixed; she was to pay up everything she had, and everything her children and their children were going to have, and even this would not be nearly enough to satisfy the demands of her self-appointed creditors, or to save her from all sorts of pains and penalties for default. The whole thing was, in fact, abject nonsense, and the Germans might just as sensibly have been required to deliver up the moon, within seven days, in a brown-paper parcel.

But to the French, at any rate, there was method in the nonsense.<sup>2</sup> There is a form of bullying, practised at schools, in which the operator bombards the victim with questions designedly impossible to answer, and then proceeds to take it out of him for not answering. And if Germany could be forced into a state of permanent default, then France might very easily claim to be released from whatever limitations she had been compelled to accept. Her main object, after all, was to have an excuse for keeping Germany in a state of impoverished impotence.

But the problem of Reparations was real, and if the idea of recouping the whole cost of the War out of Germany was as foolish as it was suicidal, the simple solution of letting her off would have meant

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by J. M. Keynes, *A Revision of the Treaty*, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> And also, it would appear, method in Mr. Lloyd George's support of an indeterminate account, whose exact amount could be fixed in a season of returning sanity.

course of subsequent events—but by no other means is it possible to understand the crazy logic of the Versailles Reparations clauses.

Next there was the question of disarmament. Here the influence of Wilson, and perhaps also of Mr. Lloyd George, had procured the insertion of the following preamble :

“In order to render possible the institution of a general limitation of armaments of all nations, Germany undertakes to observe . . .”

There followed a series of clauses cutting down Germany's armaments to the bone, leaving her in a position of helpless inferiority to such mushroom and bellicose neighbours as France's satellites, Poland and Czecho-Slovakia. This would have been reasonable enough had the explicit premise of the preamble been honoured, and the other Powers disarmed in due course down to Germany's level. It is common knowledge that this premise was cynically repudiated, and that neither France, Italy, nor any other of the armed Powers, ever showed the least intention of honouring it. Whether things would have been different if France herself had not been bilked over the Guarantee Treaty, must remain a matter for opinion.

What is certain is that France pinned her whole hope of security to perpetuating this state of things in which she would, with the aid of her allies, be able to confront Germany with a military superiority as overwhelming as Napoleon, after Tilsit, had possessed over Prussia. But there was one flaw in this scheme. The overwhelming superiority of any one Power is seldom accepted with gladness by others, and there was no guarantee of permanence in the alliance. Italy, in particular, had come into the partnership for what she could get out of it, and even during the War her relations with her Latin neighbour had been anything but cordial. If she, armed to the teeth, should set up as the champion of the dispossessed powers—what then?

And again, was England likely to be enamoured of a scheme to keep Germany from the possibility of ever becoming the good customer she had been in the past, or of a Ruhr-Alsace economic merger that would constitute a direct threat to her own industry?

From these few salient points, it will be clear that the settlement effected by the Peace Treaties possessed the elements neither of justice nor permanence. As a territorial settlement it was incomplete; as a financial settlement it was grotesque; as a military settlement it was intolerable. The one hope, one destined to be blasted almost to annihilation by America's defection, was in the Covenant of the League, that had been made part of the Versailles Treaty. That was America's special contribution to the Peace, and if her great power and influence had been fully exerted—as Wilson had no doubt intended—all might in time have been retrieved. The promise of impartial disarmament might have been honoured, and France, once the passions of war had faded into the light of common day, might have weighed the security of an Anglo-American guarantee against that of a Napoleonic army. Once the Reparations clauses had been exposed for the absurdity they were, even America, not to speak of the European Allies, might have come to the conclusion that the most profitable arrangement for everybody concerned would have been a postponement of all settlements to some future date, that might not inconceivably have come to coincide with the Greek Calends, especially if such postponement had been made conditional on some equitable modification of the territorial clauses, and particularly on an eventual reconsideration of the arrangement by which Germany's forfeited colonies were to be held in trust for the League by her late enemies. But if, from the defection of America herself, or for any other cause, that hope should fail, the outlook for civilization was dark indeed.

Never had there been a fairer opportunity. Ger-

many stood before the tribunal of her enemies, chastened, suppliant, determined to put behind her the militarist ambitions associated with the exiled Hohenzollerns. But she found no mercy, no response. Instead, no effort was spared to crush and humiliate her. She was even forced to perjure herself by subscribing to a clause, dictated by her enemies, in which she acknowledged her guilt for the War. . . .

There was a text of Scripture, if texts had been fashionable, that might have suggested certain possibilities, worth taking into account :

“When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest and finding none. Then he saith, I will return to my home from whence I came out ; and when he is come he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh unto himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there : and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

## CHAPTER IX

### TRIUMPH

Of all the diplomatic blunders committed by Germany none had been more pregnant with ultimate disaster than the parade march that her leaders had wantonly insisted on making through Paris, in 1871, after the surrender of the city. Its only effect had been to drive the iron of defeat deep into the French soul, and to create an implacable desire for revenge. One would have thought that France at least might have learnt to beware of humiliating even the most abjectly beaten enemy. But it was under her lead that the Allies decided to round off their peacemaking activities by staging a more theatrical and galling humiliation of the vanquished than any dreamed of in modern times.

German delegates were summoned to Paris to hear what fate the Allies had in store for their country. Some of them were actually suffering from the effects of physical privation ; their leader, Count Brockdorff Rantzau, was not well enough to rise from his chair to deliver his speech, a fact that was cited even in the English Press as a flagrant example of Hun insolence. The speech itself was an impassioned protest against the manifest inconsistency of the Treaty with the conditions of Germany's surrender. He referred to the hundreds of thousands of lives that he alleged to have been lost as the result of the blockade imposed after that surrender, and adjured the Allies to think of this when they talked of guilt and punishment. And he pleaded for an alteration of the peace terms so as to bring them into some semblance of agreement with the Wilson Points and Principles.

But Wilson's spiritual pride clung to the assurance of his own integrity; he dared not admit even to himself that he had stooped to injustice and dishonour—still less to have it flung in his face by his victim. So he hardened his heart, and reacted against the German protest as if he felt it to be a slight on his own honour. It was only Mr. Lloyd George, at this eleventh hour, who, in spite of his election promises and the fears of his Parliamentary supporters, made a desperate effort to water down the terms to something like sanity. As it was, he managed to secure that the district of Upper Silesia, instead of being filched from Germany in the good old Prussian way, should be allowed to decide its own fate by plebiscite. But it was too late now to introduce any other substantial alteration—least of all to modify that preposterous swindle of the Reparations bill.

There was no question, now, of armed resistance, even to the attenuated armies that still kept the watch on the Rhine. Misery had depressed the German spirit far below fighting pitch. But Mr. Lloyd George had been not unreasonably afraid that the Germans in desperation would follow the example already set by Hungary, by dissolving their own social order and going Bolshevik, so that Red revolution would reign triumphant from the Pacific to the Rhine. But against this temptation German tenacity was proof. A new team of delegates was sent to Paris to go through the farce of putting signatures to a document that the whole moral consciousness of Germany had repudiated in advance, and would certainly be honoured neither in the letter nor in the spirit for a moment longer than there was force to back it.

There was not the least pretence of extending to these delegates the courtesy that even in ancient times had hedged the persons of Ambassadors. They were treated more like criminals under arrest, or even wild beasts, since crowds of idlers came to stare across the barriers that surrounded the hotel in which they were

isolated. The ceremony of signing was carefully staged in the same Hall of Mirrors that had seen the proclamation of the German Empire. *Punch*, never more faithfully the representative of English middle-class sentiment, rubbed in the significance of this not only by depicting a brutal and desperate Prussian signing the Treaty, but by introducing the ghosts of Bismarck, Moltke and the Emperor William I to be present at the ordeal. Mr. Nicolson has recorded, in unforgettable prose, the real appearance, "isolated and pitiable", of the two delegates :

"They keep their eyes fixed away from those two thousand staring eyes, fixed upon the ceiling. They are deathly pale. They do not appear as representatives of a brutal militarism . . . it is all most pitiful."<sup>1</sup>

No sooner did the news of their signature become known, than it was greeted with a perfect pandemonium of guns firing, bands crashing the Marseillaise," all the "noises off" of what one of Mr. Kipling's schoolboys would have described as a "gloat". To a Greek, it might have seemed a supreme exhibition of god-affronting *hybris*, or arrogant insolence.

Only a few days before a grimmer drama had been enacted. The German fleet, lying at anchor at Scapa Flow, had been scuttled by its caretaker crews, rather than let it pass into the hands of the enemy. Nothing could have been of greater service to Britain, since these ships would have been distributed among rival navies. But it was regarded at the time as an act of intolerable defiance. Tempers were lost ; boats filled with escaping Germans were fired into, and some killed. The German Admiral was solemnly arraigned before his English equivalent, and replied, unanswerably, that he had done no more than an English sailor would have, if the positions had been reversed. After this, the intention of punishing him was tacitly abandoned.

It was on July the 19th that the spirit of victory

<sup>1</sup> *Peacemaking 1919*, p. 368.

reached its concluding and culminating phase, in a grand parade march, that was staged through the streets of London, with contingents representing all the Allies, and every branch of the fighting and auxiliary services. Marshal Foch was brought over as the star turn, supported by the most distinguished company of brass hats that could be collected together. The show was enormously enjoyed, with its seemingly endless procession of historic regiments, everyone of them with a fresh record of valour to add to its battle honours. But the temper of the crowd was not quite of that spontaneous exultation that had been the note of Armistice day. It was as jubilant and vociferous as any crowd could be—but it was watching the show and was no longer the show itself. It could even be humorous, after the manner of London crowds. A Chinese General, who had been roped in for the occasion, was received with the disconcerting appreciation due to the comic turn—a not inapt comment on the appearance of China among the Allies. The stately lady who rode in uniform at the head of one of the Women's Auxiliary contingents likewise provided the excuse for some good-humoured Cockney badinage. . . .

And so the long procession trudged its slow way through the London streets, the strains of brass bands contending all the time with the clapping and the cheers under a July sun. And at last, when it was all over, the crowd drifted away, feeling, perhaps, something of the mood of Stevenson's children.

Here's enough of fame and pillage . . .  
Now that we've been round the village  
Let's go home again!

Meanwhile the still unhung Kaiser had found a home of his own on the flats of Holland, and had settled down to a not uncomfortable daily routine. He had begun to grow a beard, and solaced his now ample leisure by compiling a sort of schoolboy's notebook of the more salient facts of recent European



history, by means of which he was presently to inform a wondering world of the dates of President Carnot's murder and the Russo-Japanese War. Mr. Lloyd George's dire undertaking to summon him to trial had been embodied in the Treaty, and Queen Wilhelmina's Government was duly requested to render up the body of the delinquent. It returned what amounted to a polite but conclusive snub, much to the relief of everyone concerned, except possibly Wilhelm himself, who was deprived of his last opportunity of standing in the limelight, and poor Mr. Ellis, who must have regretted the loss of so distinguished a client.

## BOOK II

# THE DREGS OF WAR

### CHAPTER I

#### NORMALCY

The American genius for word-coinage was never more happily displayed than in its adoption of "normalcy" to describe the spirit or aspiration that spread from one country to another, after the Peace, with germ-like infectiousness. There had been a catch phrase, after 1914—"Don't you know there is a war on?" It would have been quite as much to the point to have substituted, five years later—"Can't you forget there has ever been a war on?"

It was no doubt inevitable that it should have been so. Reaction is as much bound to follow tension as night to follow day. And never had tension been so abnormal, or so abnormally prolonged, as in these days of machine-powered mass-suggestion. But the more strenuously the conscious mind was kept keyed up to fighting pitch, the greater became the sub-conscious accumulation of desire to escape from this whole hateful business of war, and everything connected with it. It was when this resentment finally burst its way to the surface, that the War was lost and armies degenerated into mobs. It was with instinctive wisdom that the British Tommy had provided himself with a humorous safety valve in grouses, and songs demanding to be sent back to Blighty or replaced by the boys of the girls' brigade.

But it was only when the War was over, and there

was no apparent need to maintain the will to victory, that even the doughtiest patriots were free to confess to themselves their utter war-weariness, and indulge to the full their longing to escape not only from the fact of war, but anything remotely associated with it. Its very slang and shop were found to jar intolerably on average nerves—no one wanted to hear of sergeant-majors and Blighty ones, of plum-and-apple and mess orderlies. Publishers of fiction were soon to discover that the very last thing their public wanted to be reminded of was the War, which after a short time became a drug on the market, and remained so for several years. Even the war trophies that had been proudly set up in various districts, tanks, guns and so forth, were presently discovered to be an offence and an eyesore, and their removal demanded.

"Debunk" was another word, also of American origin, that was coming into fashion, and it was soon discovered that nothing was more popular than the debunking of the War, and of the Peace that had crowned it. The literary sensation of 1919 was the immediate and amazing success of a book published in November by Mr. J. M. Keynes, who had been chief representative of the British Treasury at the Peace Conference, and who had signified his opinion of the Treaty, as finally drafted, by resigning his post. Never was any book less like the ordinary idea of a best seller. It consisted principally of a close and detailed analysis of the Reparations Clauses, and a forecast of their effects even more pessimistic than the subsequent course of events warranted. But dry as the subject was, judged by ordinary standards, no story of crime or sex could have been bought with greater avidity. On both sides of the Atlantic the sales were on such a colossal scale as to make a fortune for the author. There could be only one explanation of this strange phenomenon, namely that Mr. Keynes was telling his public something that, without realizing it, it wanted to be told. The July parade march had written "*finis*" to the already discredited effusion of

war propaganda, in a supreme effort to advertise the Peace. And now Mr. Keynes's book excited universal applause by debunking the Peace.

The reaction, we have said, was violent in proportion to the tension it relieved—and we might add that it was indiscriminating in proportion to its violence. For though the War itself had been a catastrophe hardly preceded in the history of mankind, and the Peace was likely to prove in keeping, not everything in either the war or the peace spirit had been mischievous or ignoble. Elements of a lofty idealism had gone to the making of both, even though these had been tragically misdirected, and unable to prevail against the sordid and selfish motives that are inseparable from the business of mass slaughter, and its preparation and sequel. Both Wilson openly and Mr. Lloyd George furtively had been the champions of an idealism some of which, at least, had got embodied in the Treaties, and might, given time and faith, have proved capable of leavening that unsavoury and indigestible lump.

But to the spirit of normalcy, all idealism whatever constituted a humbug and, what was almost worse, a bore. Public sentiment, in the belligerent countries, had been on the stretch too long. There had been too many calls on the emotions. The average man had come to have a yearning, at all costs, for the commonplace and trivial, the kind of thing he had been accustomed to in that almost unbelievable Utopia that he christened "Pre-war". He would have liked to blot out the whole memory of these last five years, and start again where he had left off in the August of 1914. In a vague sort of way he even allowed himself to imagine that this would be possible.

The dominating note of 1919 was that of a vast make-believe, not that the world's great age, but its petty and commonplace age, had begun again at the exact point that it had been interrupted by the first cannon shot. There was a London season, as nearly

as possible on the old lines, with all the old features complete. Society weddings, on something like the old scale of magnificence, were trumpeted and photographed in the Press. The mimic warfare of sport was resumed with a seriousness of enthusiasm hardly inferior to that which had been aroused by the real thing. An Australian cricket team was recruited from among the fighting forces, and toured the country in quite the old way during the summer. The good old game of party politics also began to show signs of sharing in the revival, even though the preponderance of the Government team was too overwhelming to allow of much excitement within the House. And, the strife of Labour versus Capital was carried on from where it had been partially suspended in 1914, with no nonsense about an overmastering national interest, and every disposition to make up for arrears.

Whether a case could have been made out for abandoning all the hopes of a purged and reconstructed order of society, and putting the clock back to Pre-war normalcy, need not concern us here, since, whether desirable or not, the thing was impossible. The Pre-war world had been changed beyond the conceivability of restoration. The foundations of its comfort and apparent safety no longer remained. There was nothing for it except to go forward with the task of building up a new order of civilization on a new and surer basis, or else to make the best of what remained standing of the old, until the whole foundationless structure finally collapsed and buried its inhabitants beneath the ruins.

It was precisely this latter alternative that was comprehended by the term "normalcy."

## CHAPTER II

### OPTIMISM

There is this to be said for the Coalition Parliament, and the Government it had been elected to support, that an acceptance of normalcy had been no part of their original programme. The crest on which they had been swept into power at the end of 1918 had been that of the last wave of war fever. If their intentions could have been summed in a phrase, that phrase would have been, "to win the Peace." That was what the promise of houses fit for heroes was meant to imply. When Mr. Lloyd George had introduced his famous Budget of 1909, he had described it in his peroration as one of war, war on poverty. Since then he had established his claim to rank among the greatest of war Ministers. And with his laurels fresh on his brow, he would now sweep forward, at the head of a Government professedly free from the trammels of party, to another victory less spectacular, perhaps, but even more beneficent.

But it is one thing to resolve on victory, and quite another to compass the means of winning it. There were those who, after the first Battle of the Marne, had talked confidently of General French eating his Christmas dinner at Berlin. And the conditions of victory in war were simplicity itself compared with those of peace. It is easy to see now, in retrospect, that neither the Government nor the majority behind it had even begun to realize the magnitude and complexity of the problem with which they had to deal, a problem that the fulfilment of their peacemaking pledges had gone a long way towards rendering insoluble.

If we try to put ourselves back in their position, immediately after the close of hostilities, we shall realize how fatally easy it was to see things in a rosier light than the facts warranted. For the victory, in so far as it had been won on the Home Front, had been the success of a gigantic experiment in State Socialism. The most important branches of productive and distributive activity had been organized or controlled by the State with notably successful results. It was only by the control of agriculture, of shipping, and of food supplies, that the nation had been able to counter the deadly menace of the submarine blockade. The control of transport and of mining had been indispensable steps on the road to victory. The fighting forces had constituted a State industry on an enormous scale, absorbing millions of workers who were maintained and disciplined like the slaves of some glorified planter. And nobody had more triumphantly vindicated the possibilities of State action than Mr. Lloyd George himself, in his organization of the munitions industry, and the solution that his resourcefulness and drive had furnished for the great shell problem.

Was it not natural, under these circumstances, to imagine that the same methods that had won the War would prove equally effective for the winning of the Peace, and that the man whose wizardry had provided heroes with shells would be equally capable of providing them with homes? It was all a matter of bold and comprehensive planning, to adopt the word that has become fashionable since, though at that time it was more common to talk of reconstruction. It was in that light that the Government envisaged its task—to apply the immense resources of the State as energetically to reconstruction as they had been to destruction. With the opportunity, the method, and the man, so ideally met together, who could doubt that the Peace would be won as brilliantly as the War had been?

But there was one thing that the optimists, who

argued by the analogy of the war victory, had left out of account. They did not pause to consider what essentially it was that had enabled the nation to launch out so freely into those vast and no doubt successful plans of nationalization. Let us suppose that a householder, living on a few hundred a year, suddenly resolves to embark on an expensive lawsuit, that demands the whole of his energies, and involves the complete suspension of his ordinary way of life. He sells out a great part of his capital to pay the lawyers' fees, and borrows from every usurer he can get to accommodate him. At last, after interminable delays, he has the satisfaction of getting a verdict for exemplary damages out of his opponent, who proves to be a man of straw. Meanwhile, thanks to his financial activities, he has been living in the most expensive hotels and treating his family on a scale of lavish generosity. And now that the suit is over and the ordinary routine of life is to be resumed, he or they may be simple enough to imagine that they have only got to continue in the same way in order to live happy ever afterwards. What was good for the duration of the suit will be equally good for its sequel. But unfortunately our friend is already on the verge of bankruptcy. He is crippled with debt; his resources have shrunk; and, to make the analogy complete, he finds that his power to earn money is no longer what it used to be. It is not even a question of resuming his former way of life, but whether, by heroic economies, he can just succeed in carrying on and paying his way on a much lower scale of living for himself and his family.

Let us remember that before the War, even Mr. Lloyd George's Budget of 1909, that had precipitated a constitutional crisis, had been balanced at less than 162½ millions, a figure that would have horrified Gladstone, who thought anything over the hundred mark intolerable. And now Mr. Austen Chamberlain, on presenting the first peace Budget, half a year



after the signing of the Armistice, allowed for expenditure at the figure of 1,435 millions, which exceeded by 234 millions the utmost that could be screwed out of the taxpayer, and left the remainder to be raised by borrowing, and piled on to the already monstrously augmented burden of the National Debt.

But the Government had been driven to a more questionable expedient even than borrowing in the struggle for financial survival. It had already resorted to the time-honoured expedient of debasing or, as it was now called, inflating the currency, in other words, of *honouring its promises to pay only in name*, but in fact repudiating a substantial part of them by altering the value of money. This was far easier than it had been in the days of Henry VIII, when it had been necessary to mingle alloy with gold and silver. Now that the coins were replaced by pieces of paper good for any arbitrary value that was printed on them, it was only necessary to print off enough notes to be able to pay every pound you had promised by the equivalent of the ten shilling or even the penny piece that, with a *polite effrontery*, you agreed to count as a sovereign. Thus, when we talk of the National Debt, we must not forget that it could be, and was, lightened by what, in all but name, amounted to partial repudiation.

The only question was, how far this process was destined to go. In Bolshevik Russia that clear-headed and entirely ruthless class-warrior, Lenin, had already carried it to its logical conclusion of *converting money into waste-paper, and consequently its possessors into paupers*. The other European belligerents had already travelled far along the same path, not of set purpose, but because, when expenditure has reached a certain point, the easiest and sometimes the only way of carrying on is by borrowing and then debasing the coinage in which you have covenanted to pay. England could at least claim to have pursued a more honest and far-sighted policy than any of the rest. The English property-holder

had enough financial gumption to prefer having his money taken by the tax-gatherer, to keeping it in his pocket and allowing its value to dwindle away to a fraction, or vanish altogether by dint of inflation. Not so the thrifty French *rentier*, who was determined, come what might, to preserve the income he derived from his savings from all but the lowest possible percentage of taxation, and was strong enough to compel his Governments to leave their budgets unbalanced, and print the difference. He succeeded so well that in the course of a few years he had mulcted himself of something approaching four-fifths of his real income, and was in imminent danger of losing the remaining fifth.

Thus the English taxpayer cheerfully, and wisely, accepted the position of being the most closely fleeced specimen of his kind, but even so, no conceivable amount of taxation would have come near to meeting the colossal expenditure of the War. Borrowing was inevitable, on a scale heroic enough to lead to some measure of inflation. And even borrowing was reaching its limits, and could only be effected on more and more usurious terms, especially now that capital was coming to be urgently in demand for restoring private enterprises.

The real problem before the Government was therefore not how to launch out on ambitious and therefore costly schemes of reconstruction, but how to get the nation living within its means in time to prevent matters passing completely out of hand, and a situation being created from which the only outcome would be a complete repudiation of all debts, public and private, and the conversion of all money into wastepaper. The effect of such a complete social revolution in England, whose ability to get her daily bread from overseas depended on the uninterrupted functioning of her system of credit, would have been too frightful to contemplate.

There could thus be no question of Mr. Lloyd George winning the peace on the lines of his war-

time activities. The methods that had triumphed at the Ministry of Munitions would have been sheer suicide now that there was no longer money to be poured out like water. The talk about homes for heroes was, in its implications, more mischievous than froth about hanging the Kaiser. Planning and reconstruction, both excellent and indeed essential undertakings in themselves, had now to be effected on a basis of rigid economy—in fact, a wise economy was the thing that most urgently needed to be planned. It demands a higher order of skill to keep house successfully within the limits of a reduced income, than when you are living riotously on your capital and damming the expense.

The stern necessity of cutting its coat according to its cloth did not, for many months after the Armistice, begin to impress itself on the consciousness of the nation, nor were its leaders prepared to take the highly unpopular task of enlightening it. Even with the fearful figures of the Budget staring them in the face, they went on spending with the lordly prodigality to which the War had habituated them, and this not only on such necessities as the provision of homes, but on the luxuries of an ambitious foreign policy. Untaught by the lessons of the French Revolution, Britain must needs support the armies of Russian *ci-devants* who were trying to smash the Bolshevik régime, and setting up a tyranny in their wake even more intolerable to the unhappy peasantry than that of the Soviet Commissars, so that they soon had the whole countryside in rebellion behind them. The only effect of foreign support for these gentry was to confirm the Bolsheviks in power by enlisting the never long dormant patriotism of the Muscovite in their support, besides fatally prejudicing whatever claims might eventually be put in for the settlement of Russia's repudiated debts, by the establishment of a huge and, in principle, legitimate counter-claim for damages.

The new conquest of Mesopotamia, which in May,

1920 was mandated to Britain, constituted another expensive liability, absorbing a trifle of 100 millions<sup>1</sup> in its pacification and maintenance. There was a little war with Afghanistan, and smouldering rebellion in Egypt. The unrest in Ireland was rapidly developing into a guerrilla war of the most exacting character. Moreover, the demobilization troubles had had the effect of speeding up drastic increases in the pay of the new army that was being formed to take the place of the patient conscripts, who had endured Hell on a wage a mere fraction of that which civilians, in safe jobs at home, had been able to exact.

But in the first burst of relief after the War, nobody very much bothered about these things. Nobody, in fact, was in a mood to be bothered about anything. A deficit of 234 millions was nothing accounted of by people who had become so habituated to staggering figures, of casualties, of expenditure, of indemnities, as to be incapable of reacting to them. No doubt, now that the War was won, everything would come right in due course. Once the screw was applied to Jerry, he would be compelled to make good any debit balance there might be in the accounts of the victors. As Lord Hugh Cecil said, on the question of a capital levy—if it was possible “we need not make it in this country; it should be quite easy to make it in Germany”.<sup>2</sup> So many desirable things appeared “quite easy” in those days!

Right through this year of victory, 1919, and on into the next, the optimists did seem to be having it sufficiently their own way to meet the requirements of a people to whom optimism had become, for the time being, an absolute necessity. It was wonderful how successfully Britain was effecting the transition from her war-time activities to those of honourable trade. The returning millions were, on the whole, quickly and smoothly absorbed into the jobs of

<sup>1</sup> *The Consequences of the War to Great Britain*, by F. W. Hirst, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

civilian life. Unemployment was almost negligible; the most reliable figures, those quoted by Professor Bowley<sup>1</sup> of the unemployed of certain Trades Unions, fluctuating in the neighbourhood of 2 per cent (much even of this accounted for by demobilized men in process of absorption), and in April 1920 sinking below 1 per cent.

For trade was booming in the most satisfactory way. So much had been destroyed during the War, so much had fallen into arrears, that there was urgent need for restocking, and a demand for all sorts of useful products from anyone capable of supplying them. The German armies had rendered excellent service to Britain's vital mining industry by the senseless and malicious damage they had done to the mines of France. The strong arms that had driven the shafts under the German position at Messines, and been the means of hoisting a considerable part of it into the air at zero hour, were at work again exploiting the coal seams of the West and North. The machines in the factories purred and throbbed in full chorus, and smoke belching from their chimneys darkened the sun in the most satisfactory way.

Nor was there any serious reason to grumble at wages. The new poor were recruited from the salaried and dividend-drawing classes. It is true that the glorious times had come to an end for the army of female war-workers, who had no more bothered to lay up against a rainy or peaceful day than any other section of the community. The fur coats and other finery were already beginning to find their way into the hands of "Uncle".<sup>2</sup> But this was not altogether an unmixed evil to the returning working man, who was apt to find the newly acquired tastes of his younger womenfolk a source of some embarrassment. He himself had claimed and secured the principle that wages should rise in proportion

<sup>1</sup> *Some Economic Consequences of the Great War*, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> Hirst, *op cit.*, pp. 285-6.

to the cost of living, and during 1919 and 1920 they appear to have risen, on the average, slightly above this level.<sup>1</sup> For hours, the worker was even better off, if we may trust Professor Bowley's statement that "in 1919 and 1920 hours were generally reduced, so that on the average the duration of the week's work was 10 to 13 per cent less in 1924 than in 1914."<sup>2</sup>

On the whole it might have been argued, by anyone who could not see into the future, that whoever else had suffered from the War, it had been an excellent thing for the British working man. There was an enormous debt, but even with the level of complete exemption from Income Tax down to £130 a year, only a trifling fraction of this came out of his pocket—more trifling still when in 1920 it was raised to £150 for earned incomes. There might be wail in ancestral halls and woe in genteel villas, but in the worker's cottage the conditions were actually better than in 1914. If he could get a cottage for love or money, that is to say!

<sup>1</sup> See the Article *Cost of Living* in 1922 Supplement to *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 148.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BOOM

When, in the spring of 1920, Mr. Chamberlain introduced his second Budget, optimism, including his own, had reached the culminating point. Expenditure for the past year had exceeded that for which he had so generously estimated by no less than 231 millions, and was to be continued on the same lavish and light-hearted scale. Far from lightening the burden of taxation, he proposed to add to it an amount considerably exceeding (in a full year) the whole sum of that levied in any year before the War. But this time at least the Budget was balanced without the use of the printing press. Instead of a final deficit, on the previous year's account, of 326 millions, a surplus was estimated for of 234 millions, and very nearly realized. But this happy result was only attained by what amounted to a feat of financial legerdemain. Stores, collected for the War, were sold off to the extent of 302 million in that financial year, and by the time the whole transaction was completed, for a sum exceeding that of the whole Pre-war National Debt, and this capital realization, instead of being written off against the capital of the debt, was thrown into the balance as income. Thus in spite of the flattering figures, the plain fact of the matter was that not even in this second year after the War had John Bull resumed his former habit of living within his income, though it was something to have checked the process of inflation by any means whatever.

Meanwhile a fresh channel of expenditure had been opened by the pledge of providing homes fit for

heroes. The fact is that during the War, so completely had the energy and resources of the nation been diverted to the work of destruction that so prosaic a necessity as that of making good the annual depreciation of house property had been neglected altogether. Dr. Addison, the President of the Local Government Board, estimated in April, 1919, that the shortage of working-class houses, judged by peace time standards, amounted to 350,000, a figure that would have been considered appalling had these houses been destroyed by shells instead of by time. Another 60,000 houses, though standing, were unfit for human habitation, and yet another 300,000 seriously defective. That meant that no less than 3,000,000 people were crowded together in homes more fitted for pigs than heroes.<sup>1</sup>

There were critics of the Government who did not hesitate, under these circumstances, to demand that Mr. Lloyd George should tackle the problem of housing as he had that of munitions—that he should wave his wizard's wand, and cause a million or so houses of the latest pattern to spring up on the best and surest foundations. But even in these days of easy spending it was hard to ignore the fact that dearth of labour and materials had already far more than doubled the cost of building, and that any abnormal demand was likely to force it up still higher. As it was, legislation was passed making it compulsory for local authorities to undertake adequate schemes of housing, committing the general taxpayer to foot the bill, when it exceeded the produce of a penny rate, and, when this did not produce the houses at anything like the rate required, subsidizing private builders to the extent of round about £240 per annum. But powerful and monopolistic Trades Unions were able to prevent the drafting of additional labour into the industry to any adequate extent, and the effect of the stimulus was to rocket up the price of housing, by 1920, to an extent approaching 4 times, for each

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Register*, 1919, pp. 51-2.



person housed, what it had been before the War, and compelling the Government to scrap its scheme in the following year.

But though the homes fit for heroes still delayed to materialize, borrowing to build them was encouraged on a heroic scale. Corporations followed the lead of the State in doing this on the most extravagant terms—the only terms, in fact, that could be obtained. As a typical specimen, take the loans raised by Reading and four other boroughs early in 1920. Here money was borrowed by the issue of stock bearing interest at 6 per cent., and offered at £92 for a nominal hundred. For the next twenty years, therefore, these boroughs were saddled with a tribute totalling £120 for every £92 borrowed, and then, on paying back the principal, having to make good an additional £8.

This time of the Post-war boom might have been described as a usurer's paradise, but for the fact that it was getting more and more doubtful how long, and to what extent, promises to pay interest would, or could, be honoured. Capital was urgently in demand, not, as before the War, for the use of overseas borrowers, but for employment at home, and lenders were consequently able to exact a swingeing tribute from borrowers. Thus not only the State and public corporations, but commerce and industry, were saddling themselves with obligations, or promises to pay, that might handicap them gravely in the future, and impose a greater strain on the social system than it would prove easily capable of bearing.

Meanwhile, in spite of the boom, or perhaps because of it, the price of everything, instead of settling down after the War, continued to soar in a fashion that suggested that the English pound might be destined shortly to go the way of the Russian rouble. The housewife began to look back almost with regret on the days of strict rationing and the submarine blockade. As one article after another was decontrolled, its price also got out of control. There was a hunt for scapegoats, and an attempt to blame it all

on that elusive villain, the profiteer. The Government was only too happy to humour this disposition, and passed an Act setting up local committees for the exposure and defeat of this new and undefined offence of profiteering. As these bodies usually contained a good proportion of local tradesmen, it is no wonder that the Act died stillborn! But the profiteer, though he is always with us, and never gets so rich a haul as when fishing in troubled waters, was not primarily responsible for the inflation of prices that is the nemesis of unbalanced budgets and a debased currency.

It was during 1920 that prices rose to a peak, though even then England might have accounted herself fortunate in comparison with the other European ex-belligerents. Estimates vary, but in the early spring, just before the boom broke, it is certain that wholesale prices were more than three times what they had been in 1913—in France it was 5 times, in Italy 6, and in Germany and Austria far more. Retail prices never, on a general average, quite reached this figure, though in some instances they greatly exceeded it—sugar, for instance, actually touched 7 times its Pre-war price. But the highest figure for food prices, in general, is that recorded by the *Labour Gazette* for November, 1920, which is 291 as against the Pre-war 100. The same authority quoted some interesting figures of the housewife's budget for December of that year, as compared with July, 1914. The four pound loaf is 1s. 4d. as against 5½d.; cheese 1s. 9d., against 8½d. per pound; butter 3s. 3½d. against 1s. 2½d. Margarine, which was about the price of the Pre-war butter, was consequently being substituted for it in homes that had at one time hardly known of its existence. As for meat, British joints had become a rich man's luxury, British mutton, for instance, being a penny less than two shillings a pound, instead of a farthing over eightpence, and the price for imported mutton just under half that of British.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Professor Bowley's article on *Prices* in the 1922 Supplement to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

inauguration, his nobly-chiselled features contrasting significantly with the heavy lineaments of the popular choice. Normalcy had triumphed, and there was nothing left for Wilson but to die.

He was not the first of the two to go. While he still lingered on in retirement at Washington, with only the consciousness of his own integrity to cheer him, death had visited the White House, and released President Harding from one of the most monstrous scandals of political corruption in modern times. Dreadful rumours were circulated about the manner of his death—but it is not necessary to credit these in order to judge the tree of normalcy by its fruits. It was a growth by no means peculiar to the Western Hemisphere.

That the United States should deprive the League of Nations, her President's own creation, of her all-important support, was a disaster whose effects it would be hard to measure, but even more serious, in its immediate consequences, was her refusal to ratify the treaty safeguarding France's security, a refusal that entailed that of Britain, who was unwilling to shoulder the responsibility alone. But it was in consideration of this guarantee that France had been induced to drop her claim to the Rhine line and a Rhineland Protectorate. A people less sensitively egoistic than the French would have had some excuse for feeling itself the victim of a swindle. And they little knew the French nature who imagined that the *sait accompli* would be meekly accepted. There might yet prove to be loopholes in the Treaty that would provide France with all the excuse she needed for possessing herself of the Rhine, and perhaps even of the Ruhr into the bargain. The American withdrawal had rendered it certain that France would be as disturbing a factor in Europe as a bilked piper in Hamelin.

England, too, was coming to realize into what sort of a bargain she had been roped at Versailles. Public opinion, in spite of the Harmsworth Press,

which, now that Mr. Lloyd George was displaying symptoms of cold feet, became more noisily pro-French than ever, was veering round to agreement with Mr. Keynes about the Treaty. As for the Premier, neither the letter nor the spirit of that scrap of paper possessed any special sanctity in his eyes. His signature had been one of the many improvised solutions of his career—it had seemed the best thing to be done under the circumstances, and was the final discharge from his election pledges. And now, since it appeared impossible to execute the Treaty as it stood, and ruinous to attempt it, it was clearly necessary, by scrapping some parts and whittling down others, to adapt it to the requirements of civilized intercourse, and above all, to the needs of British industry, that would never get on its feet again, so long as the French policy of crushing and weakening Germany prevailed.

The French, who are apt to ascribe to John Bull a monopoly of cant, did not hesitate to point out that a bargain was a bargain, and logical consistency a moral imperative. But French policy no more regarded the sanctity of Versailles than that of Mr. Lloyd George himself. It aimed at wrenching and stretching the provisions of the Treaty, so as to recover for France those fruits of victory that—for what now turned out to be a bogus consideration—she had been induced to renounce.

Thus between Mr. Lloyd George and the French there developed an antagonism that, though masked at first under a veneer of unbroken cordiality, soon became too patent to be concealed. Why, indeed, should Britain have been made the cat paw of an egotism that had no more regard for her interests than those of Germany? And why should she be party to a fraud of which she was to be one of the victims?

Mr. Lloyd George has himself described how, when the French Bill for reconstruction of the devastated regions, which had been left uncomputed in the Treaty,

was first made out, he was staggered to find that this far exceeded the value of house property (according to French statistics for 1917) for the whole of France ! But even this trifle of £3,000 millions was not enough to satisfy the requirements of M. Klotz, the French finance Minister, who subsequently raised the total to the equivalent of £5,360 millions.<sup>1</sup> And this did not include the further and palpably fraudulent claim for war pensions and allowances under the heading of civilian damages. All this for France alone !

Violence, no less than extortion, was part of the French programme, and if the Treaty did not sanction it—so much the worse for the Treaty ! As early as April, 1920, a technical breach of its provisions had provided an excuse for the invasion of German territory and the seizure of Frankfurt, coloured troops being freely employed for the purpose, and even—it was alleged—being billeted in the house of Goethe.

The ink of the last ratification signature was not dry before a series of Conferences had begun, at first confined to representatives of the ex-Allies, with the object, principally, of giving effect to the Treaty. These Conferences followed one another in bewildering succession at the rate of no less than twenty-three in the next three years. It had been the same after Waterloo, only the Conferences then had been fewer and spread out over a longer period, doubtless owing to the lack of transport facilities. The dominating figure, throughout, was Mr. Lloyd George, whose part in them has been described by Mr. Keynes in one of his most telling passages :

At each of them he pushed the French as far as he could, but not as far as he wanted ; and then came home to acclaim the settlement provisionally reached (and destined to be changed a month later) as an expression of complete accord between him and his French colleague, as a nearly perfect embodiment of wisdom, and as a settlement that Germany would be well

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<sup>1</sup> *The Truth about Reparations and War Debts*, by D. Lloyd George, p. 20.

advised to accept as final, adding, about every third time, that if she did not, he would support the invasion of her territory.<sup>1</sup>

His difficulties in trying to make things easier for Germany were increased by the impracticable attitude adopted by the Germans themselves, who were obviously determined neither to pay nor to disarm at all unless they were driven. It cannot be denied that Germany was making an admirable, even an heroic effort to steer a democratic middle course between the Scylla of the old militarism and the Charybdis of the new Bolshevism. In March, 1920, the desperate attempt of some undemobilized troops to effect a counter-revolution had been defeated by a general strike—the iron had to enter more deeply into her soul before Germany would be ripe for Hitlerism. But the subsequent elections had revealed an ominous strengthening of the extremist parties on both sides. And it was no intention of the French to give the moderates a chance to set Germany's house in order, and turn her into a peaceful and contented neighbour.

It was not until July, after a whole series of inharmonious Conferences between the Allies, that the obvious step was taken of calling German representatives into consultation at the Kaiser's old Headquarters at Spa, in Belgium. The Germans had, by this time, developed a regrettable, but not unnatural, inferiority complex, and their team of representatives was composed of such jarring elements as the multi-millionaire, Hugo Stinnes, the blunt soldier, Von Seeckt, and the financier, Walther Rathenau, who, as well as being a Jew, was the best European at the Conference, and as anxious as Mr. Lloyd George himself to come to some practicable compromise without openly abandoning the Treaty. From the first, it was quite evident that the Allies and the Germans were still too far apart to come to any sort of agreement, and Stinnes, a very caricature of the brutal Capitalist, lost his temper, and bawled and blustered at the astonished

<sup>1</sup> *A Revision of the Treaty*, p. 14.

diplomats as if he were bullying his clerks. Accordingly resort was had to sabre-rattling. Marshal Foch and Sir Henry Wilson appeared in uniform complete ; an ultimatum was drafted, and terms were forced on the Germans that provided, amongst other things, for the immediate delivery to France of a great deal of coal. This, as we shall see, was to enable France to strike a deadly blow, not at German, but British prosperity.

## CHAPTER V

### CLASS WAR RESUMED

The return to normalcy was effected in the relations of Capital to Labour almost at once after the Armistice. The years immediately preceding the War had witnessed a conflict between them of ever-increasing bitterness. The worker, who had felt his standard of living threatened, had sought instinctively for the cause in the greed of the Capitalist, and visualized the conflict as one between himself and his employer, rather than as one in concert with his employer to prevent the shrinkage of that total dividend out of which both wages and profits were derived. There had been strikes in each of the great key industries of mining, railways and transport workers. Each of them had ended in more or less of a disappointment to the strikers. There had been talk, and more than talk, of binding the Unions of all three industries into one great offensive and defensive alliance, capable of paralysing the whole life of the community by a concerted strike. The experiment would almost certainly have been tried if the outbreak of the War had not shelved it for "duration".

Now that the war of nations was over, the war of class was taken up at the precise point it had been left off. The partial disuse of the strike weapon had only created a keener zest for its employment now that the last patriotic inhibitions were withdrawn. And the situation was dominated by the menace of the same Triple Alliance that had been in process of formation before the War, and this might function as a spear-head for an offensive by the whole organized forces of



Labour. The General Strike was as plainly foreshadowed as the Great War had been.

What made the situation still more troublesome was the fact that nobody knew what the value of money, and therefore of wages, was going to be from one month to another. Thus it was extremely difficult to arrive at any settlement that would possess the quality of permanence, except by the application of sliding scales, which were neither easy to frame nor to apply to the satisfaction of both parties.

The first in the field were the miners, who, like the mineowners on their side, were always the most uncompromising protagonists of the class war. As early as January, 1919, they had put forward demands not only for a 30 per cent increase of wages over and above the war wage already granted to compensate for the increased cost of living, but for a reduction of the working day from 8 hours to 6, and the maintenance of all demobilized miners on a full wage, out of the pocket of the taxpayer, until jobs could be found for them. To these demands was shortly added one for the nationalization of all mines and minerals. This would certainly have involved a considerable increase in the price of coal and consequently of steel, and, according at any rate to Mr. Lloyd George, in a great increase in unemployment. Certain concessions were made, and a Royal Commission was hastily set up to enquire into the whole question, but this did not prevent a ballot from being taken on the question of a strike, and resulting in the huge bellicose majority that is the practically invariable response of the team spirit to such appeals. In spite of the strenuous efforts that were made for conciliation, it was doubtful whether the fighting spirit of the miners could be held in leash till even the most hurried publication of the report, or whether anything less than the full concession of their claims would avert stoppage.

This was the beginning of a perfect epidemic of strikes, and threats of strikes. In the engineering and shipbuilding trades, hours had been reduced, on New

Year's Day, to 47 a week, but a limit of 44 was demanded, and this was lowered, by the more intransigent spirits, to 40. In Belfast, the corporation employees came out in support of the shipyard men, and cut off the whole gas and electricity supplies of the city. In Glasgow, the strikers actually succeeded in inducing the Lord Provost to transmit their request to the Government that the employers should be compelled to grant their demands, failing which they would abandon constitutional methods and adopt any others likely to advance their cause. And sure enough, on the Government's refusal, there was smashing of windows, overturning of tram-cars, looting of shops, the reading of the Riot Act, and charges by the Police. Next the London Electricians intervened to compel the Government to give way to the commands of the Clydeside Unions, and their District Secretary fulminated an ultimatum threatening to plunge the whole of London into darkness, and to paralyse its electrical services. The Government had to counter this by the power given it under the Defence of the Realm Act to make such action criminal.<sup>1</sup>

As the year went on, the situation grew even more ominous. By March, each member of the Triple Alliance was on the verge of a strike, and had to be bought off by expensive concessions. In the summer, the whole cotton trade was held up by a strike for higher wages and lower hours, in which the men succeeded in securing the greater part of their demands. And then the epidemic spread to the police, who wanted to have their own union, to speak with authority even on questions of discipline. With this there could be no parleying, and constables who left work were dismissed, with loss of pension. But in Liverpool, where over 40 per cent of the available force was involved, the unusual spectacle was witnessed of the underworld of crime and anarchy breaking its bounds and challenging the reign of

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Register*, pp. 9-11.

law, until soldiers had to be called in to substitute the bayonet for the truncheon.

Meanwhile an uneasy peace, or truce, had been secured in the mines. The Royal Commission appointed to deal with the matter had issued an interim report on March 20, when the strike notices were already out, and on the strength of it an offer was immediately made to the miners of substantial increases of pay and reduction of hours, but deferring the question of nationalizing the mines for two months' further consideration. The men were induced by their leaders to accept this instalment of their claims, and the Commission was kept hard at work till the 20th of May, a comic touch being imparted to its proceedings by a prolonged verbal duel between the most intransigent of its miner members, Mr. Smillie, and the Duke of Northumberland, a fanatical Die-hard, no small part of whose immense wealth was derived from mining royalties. When the final report appeared, it turned out that the chairman, Mr. Justice Sankey, afterwards to become Lord Chancellor in a Labour Government, had supported the Labour members of the Commission in advocating the nationalization of the mines, thus giving a majority of one in favour of that proposal. How so tremendous an operation was going to be financed at a time when the national expenditure was still enormously in excess of revenue, was not easy to conceive, though the three representatives of the miners on the Commission proposed to simplify it by confiscating mining royalties without compensation. But at this time few people had begun seriously to bother about such sordid inhibitions as that of cutting a coat according to the cloth. For the present, though the Government took no steps to nationalize the mines, and Mr. Smillie threatened direct action, the miners refrained, in view of the advantages they had already secured, from pushing matters to extremities. Meanwhile, the price of coal was mounting, and the output per shift diminishing to an alarming extent.

In September occurred a great railway strike. A settlement had been patched up in the spring which had added 6½ millions to the wage bill, and involved substantial increases in both passenger and goods fares. But the railwaymen were still unsatisfied, and under the leadership of their Secretary, the Rt. Hon. J. H. Thomas, the most astute of all the Trades Union leaders and the one most hated by the extremist Left, applied the new method of a lightning strike—a declaration of war without notice. The response was enough, for the first day or two, to effect a practically complete hold up of the railway system, and to inflict no small hardship on those poorer members of the community who found themselves stranded away from home, without the alternative resource of motor transport. So serious was the situation deemed, that Lord Haig was called into consultation by the Cabinet, and a Milk Pool established in Hyde Park—not for the last time. But leaders like Mr. Thomas, and Mr. Cramp, the President of the Union, were not the men to push matters to an extremity. After the first day or two there was a steady trickle of the less combative spirits back to work, and a large influx of unskilled but enthusiastic volunteers, so that a skeleton train service was got going somehow. The only question was whether the two other members of the Triple Alliance would join in the fray. Their leaders, who were perhaps less keen on fighting the Railwaymen's battle than their own, essayed the part of honest brokers. After a good deal of haggling and manœuvring for position, it was arranged on October 5 that the strike should be called off and negotiations resumed. What advantage had accrued to anyone from the nine days' war on the lines, it would have been difficult to determine.

For a year after this, while the boom was at its height, there was constant friction in the Labour world, but no stoppage of the first magnitude. But for the greater part of the summer of 1920, it was obvious that matters were working up for another crisis in

the coal industry. The miners still had the feeling of being in a position of advantage that they had only got to press home. Although during the boom their wages had risen with the cost of living, they made a demand for a yet further increase. The owners were ready to meet them, but made their offer conditional on an increase of output, and this even the formidable Mr. Smillie recommended the men to accept, at any rate for the time being. But a ballot was taken, with the usual result of a sweeping majority for the extreme course, and, all efforts for peace having failed, a strike broke out on October 16th, and went on till November 4th, when the advance was conceded. It was a victory disastrous for the victors. A worse time for a stoppage in the mines, with a consequent diversion of orders to the United States and an increase of the wages bill, could not have been chosen.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BOOM COLLAPSES

For now the peak of the boom was definitely past, and the time of deceptive prosperity for the worker at an end. No longer would it be a question of his dictating terms and pushing home an advantage, but of clinging to his job and a living wage by any means whatever. Between October 23 and November 26 the number of registered unemployed had leapt up from 344,000 to 520,000. On January 8th, 1921, it was 859,000 and still rising, with the appalling rapidity of a river that had burst its dams. That month it topped the million mark.

It was worst of all in the coal trade, which was now confronted with the reality of a world no longer prepared to buy British coal to an extent sufficient to demand the services of over a million miners. The realization was bound to have come in any case, but the break was precipitated not only by the strike, but still more by the fatal success of the Allies in securing coal deliveries from Germany. The French not only got all the coal they could profitably employ, but a great deal more, that choked the sidings, and had to be dumped beyond the frontier for whatever it would fetch, with disastrous results to the British export trade. Nor was this a merely temporary misfortune, but the beginning of a depression calculated to render superfluous the services of hundreds of thousands of hands. And the miner is not the type of worker who can just put down his pick and his lantern, and change over to some job on the surface. He is, by disposition and training, a specialized being. If the pit closes,

the community attached to it will be reduced to a dead-alive sort of existence, waiting about in hopeless idleness and subsisting on such a moiety of other mens' earnings as the community can afford to dole out.

It was not only the French success in exacting Reparations from the Germans that proved a bane to workers in Britain. No part of the Treaty had given greater satisfaction than that which compelled Germany not only to hand over the whole of her merchant fleet, but even to build ships over and above this total to compensate for the damage done by the U-boat campaign. It was dramatic justice, but it was very bad business. Every ship provided free meant one less to be built in British yards. The ship-building industry was hit almost as hard as that of the mines, and was falling into a depression no less prolonged.

The collapse of the boom was not confined to one or two industries. It was general, and disastrous. The mounting figures of unemployment told their own tale. In hundreds of thousands, the figures month by month from the beginning of 1921 were 12, 14, 16, 22, until May showed a total exceeding  $2\frac{1}{2}$  millions. This was partly accounted for by a new coal strike, but at the end of the year the figure was 1,885,478. Such a state of things went far beyond the worst nightmares of pessimists in the Pre-war days. But the gloomiest pessimist of 1921 would scarcely have ventured to predict that for the whole of that decade, only during two isolated months were the figures of registered unemployed destined to fall below a million, and that in the nineteen-thirties it was to rise and remain steady above the 2 million level, and at one time to come not far short of a third million!

But to those who had anything to lose that could be expressed in money values, the break of the boom came not as a nightmare, but as an awakening from one. They must have felt like the Armada seamen, who were drifting helplessly, after their great defeat, to destruction on the Dutch sands, when they felt the

wind change just in the nick of time. The cost of living had reached its peak in November, 1920, when the figure stood at 176 per cent above Pre-war. In other words, the housewife's pound was fetching her not much more than 7s. worth of goods, as goods were priced in July, 1914. The housekeeping that she had once budgeted for at a pound a week would now mean a disbursement of £2 15s. And this out of an income which, like that of Mr. H. G. Wells, as described in his *Autobiography*, might easily have melted away to half its Pre-war figure.

And then relief came with merciful swiftness. That month, as if the consuming public had itself determined to join in the strike movement and down purses, there was a sudden stoppage of buying. The shopkeepers tried to console themselves with hopes of a Christmas rush. But there was no rush. In the warehouses of the wholesale manufacturers in the North and Midlands, stocks began to accumulate. The manufacturers accordingly had resort to the banks for loans to keep their businesses above water. But the bankers themselves, threatened with greater demands than they could meet, sat tight on their coffers. The manufacturers, in sight of bankruptcy, had only one resource. They must sell off their wares at any price they could get for them. And the London shops, which were thus able to replenish their stocks at dirt-cheap prices, must now compel their customers to buy by flinging the goods in their faces at far below cost price. The January sales must have seemed, to the almost despairing housewives, like a gigantic windfall. Prices had slumped in a fortnight to a half or even a third of what they had been.

Nor was this a mere temporary respite. All through the year the cost of living continued to go down. From a maximum percentage of 176 above Pre-war level, it had dropped by the end of December to a mere 99 (which was severe enough, when one reflects that it was almost twice what it had been in 1914). After that the descent was less steep, the fall



in the ensuing year being about 20 points. But till the middle of 1922, at any rate, the tendency was for cost of living to fall faster than wages.<sup>1</sup> For those, that is to say, who could earn any wages at all!

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Article *Prices*.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SOCIAL PROBLEM

Only two years had passed since the victory, but its fruits had already turned to ashes in the mouths of the victors. It was a distracted, impoverished and debt-laden Europe that had survived the War that was to have ended war. But that would not have mattered so much if the years of sacrifice had turned it into a nobler and a wiser Europe, purged of the spirit of anarchic egotism that had led so inevitably to the catastrophe of 1914. But it was quite evident that the belligerent nations had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing, and that even those long enslaved peoples whom the War had released from their chains, only intended to turn their freedom into a cloak of tyranny.

No new order of civilization showed signs of emerging. The League of Nations, on which all the hopes of such an order centred, was as yet little more than a league of allies, reinforced by a mob of supernumeraries, and crippled almost to impotence by the defection of America. Nor had the War left any legacy of loyalty between the Allies themselves. Each was out for its own hand, and its hand was against all the others. And this not only in the political but in the economic sphere.

The result was to render the social problem practically insoluble for any individual government. It would have been just as sensible to have left the tasks of finding work for the unemployed, of trade revival, of industrial reorganization, and of raising the necessary funds, entirely in the hands of local bodies, as to

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expect any national government to accomplish them off its own bat. A machine-powered civilization is by its very nature international, and the network of credit and exchange on which it depends is world-wide. And the solution even of its domestic problems is likewise international. A miner in some Welsh valley, who finds his occupation gone, not unnaturally blames it on the Government or the employers. But neither Government nor employers can prevent artificial barriers being erected against the sale of British coal overseas, or the dumping of Reparations coal on its accustomed markets, nor can they create the prosperity and settled conditions abroad that enable customers to buy, nor yet control the financial operations that stabilize or upset the exchanges.

The results are the more serious from the fact that these limitations on the power of governments are almost universally ignored by the electorate, and even the governments themselves. Here, for instance, in Britain, was this dual problem of a working class habituated to demand a living wage of a certain standard, and the fact that there appeared no way of providing such a wage for at least a million of those able and willing to work for it. What was to be done about it? Were the resources of statesmanship exhausted? Was this army of a million and more unemployed harder to dispose of than all the hosts of the Hapsburgs and Hohenzollerns? It was indeed, as the coming years were to prove, and the evil, not only in Britain, but every other nation, was destined to be worse before it would be better.

But still the simple argument held that it was the Government's business to put an end to this state of things, or else to depart and give place to better men. Nor did the politicians themselves take any exception to these requirements. On the contrary, they invariably twitted their opponents with having no remedy for unemployment and its kindred evils of depressed trade and social discontent, and came before the electorate with a *nostrum* of their own, guaranteed to do

the business. As these nostrums never, at best, proved more than superficial palliatives, and more often than not left things worse than before, it followed that any Government's popularity was apt to be exceedingly short lived. And as first this expedient and then that broke down in practice, the temptation became irresistible to advertise more drastic and dangerous cure-alls, that were, in fact, better calculated to kill the patient outright, schemes of curing poverty by juggling with the currency, schemes involving colossal expenditure, or, again, calling Satan to cast out Satan by intensifying that very anarchy that was at the root of all the mischief.

There was one cure already being advertised that was destined to be dropped before any occasion could arise for putting it into practice. This was the Capital Levy, that figured as the main plank of the Labour Party's programme, though it is only fair to add that Bonar Law himself seems at one time to have toyed with the idea, "doubtless," as a school Commentary remarks of Noah's indulgence in wine, "in ignorance of its properties." It was a curiously exact translation into terms of the class war of the policy of the Versailles Reparations. The idea was to lighten the enormous burden of war indebtedness by confiscating a percentage of everyone's capital, who was possessed of more than £5,000, starting at 2 per cent, and rising, on millionaires' fortunes, to as much as 56.<sup>1</sup> And just as with the wealth of Germany, it was assumed that all this nominal capital was actually *there*, and could be seized and transferred intact.

If the scheme had been realized according to programme, something like £300 millions, or less than half the total debt, would have been paid off. But the mere attempt to do so, or even the knowledge that such an attempt would be made, would have so shaken the confidence of which capital values are a translation, as to have caused a slump in the values of all securities, and consequently in the yield of the pro-

<sup>1</sup> *The Capital Levy Explained*, by Hugh Dalton.

posed percentages on any assessment that would eventually have been made. And then the crucial question would have arisen—who was to turn this capital, to be handed over under the assessment, into its equivalent in currency or War Bonds? Was the State to take over its due percentage of shares, land, and personal possessions, and realize them for what they would fetch? The promoters of the Levy were shrewd enough to know what sort of a bargain this would have been, and to what exiguous proportions the proposed windfall was likely to dwindle under such circumstances. The burden of realization would have to be thrust on to the payee. He would be assessed for so many pounds, shillings and pence, and be expected to hand them over in a certain time, or suffer distraint up to the full value of his possessions. The result, of course, would be to start everybody selling out capital at once, for what it would fetch, which, in a market where everybody was a seller and hardly anybody a buyer, would soon have been next to nothing. Thus the man assessed at £30,000, faced with a demand for £5,800, might easily have found the whole of his fortune insufficient to purchase this fraction of its nominal value. The more wealth anyone had, the more certain would have been his ruin. The Levy must thus have resolved itself into a vast expropriation of all fortunes above a certain amount, a wholesale pauperization of the well-to-do, while the loss of revenue to the State would more than probably have outweighed any gain of capital—to say nothing of the collapse of credit and economic chaos that must certainly have ensued.

It would have been simpler, if the thing had got to be done, to have lightened the debt by open repudiation of part of the interest, perhaps accompanied by a proportionate reduction of all other debts, or to have done the same thing less openly by inflation. But this would have *directly affected a much larger proportion* of the community, and would not have had the electoral advantage of singling out a comparatively small

minority for contribution. Psychologically, it might be as pleasant to think of running through the pockets of the Capitalist as those of the Hun. But as practical propositions, there was scarcely anything to choose between the two.

As it was, wealth was being taxed, almost to the limit of its capacity. A very rich man, who before the War would have grumbled at parting with a twelfth of his income, would now be thankful to be allowed to keep a third of it, or to leave much more than half to his heirs. Taxation was more drastic than that of any other civilized Power, not even excepting Germany, being at an average of over £22 per head, and this was so graded as to fall as far as possible on the richer members of the community. That the social problem could be solved by the simple process of screwing more out of the Capitalist was a palpable illusion.

In 1920, the Coalition Government passed a comprehensive Act for the alleviation, as distinct from the prevention of unemployment. This it sought by extending the scheme of unemployment insurance, which had first been framed on a limited scale by Mr. Lloyd George in 1911, to cover the whole working population with certain exceptions, of which agriculture and domestic service were the chief. This Act, which repealed all previous ones, and was modified by no less than fourteen others in the next seven years, was a corner-stone of social policy no less than the great Poor Law Reform Act of 1834.

The contrast between the two is significant of the change in conditions brought about by the triumph of machinery, and of sentiment by the achievement of a suffrage practically universal. In those days the mere fact of being out of work, from any cause whatever, had been visited with pains and penalties that would be considered too inhuman, nowadays, to be inflicted on the worst of criminals. The person without either work or savings had to be kept alive indeed, but only just alive, at such tender mercies as



those of Mr. Bumble. And yet no other measure of the time had received such unstinted praise as a piece of scientific legislation. And there is this to be said for its authors, that in their day it is to the last degree improbable that the community could have provided a surplus capable of maintaining one—let alone two or three—million potential workers in a state of not intolerable idleness.

For machine powered civilization cuts two ways. If it tends to create masses of unemployed, by substituting machine for human labour, and enabling one mechanic to take over the jobs of a dozen, or perhaps dozens, of labourers, it may also multiply production to such an extent as to allow the community to carry its unemployed on its back without breaking it.

This is not for a moment to deny the evil of a state of things in which unemployment is chronic, mitigated though it may be by the capacity to keep the wolf from the door. A healthy—which is the same as to say a scientifically organized society—would never be troubled by a surplus either of labour or of products. The capacity for producing enjoyable things will never outrun the capacity for enjoyment, not even when every dustman has a suite in the Ritz and every junior clerk drives home in his own Rolls-Royce. It is all a matter of adjusting production to consumption by organizing distribution, and of increasing the capacity for enjoyment by educating desire. It is, in the last resort, a task of equipping Man with a mind, and soul, commensurate with the improvement of his machinery.

And so long as nothing better could be thought of than a surplus of unemployed workers, *running into seven figures*, and kept alive by drawing on the surplus production of the rest of the community, it is obvious that mental must have lagged dangerously behind material progress. The dole was at best a palliative, and not a cure, of a disease that might end by poisoning the social system. But even a palliative is better than some cure-alls.

## CHAPTER VIII

### RED PERIL

When the War had started, in August, 1914, nothing had seemed more obvious than that it would end in a victory for one side and a defeat for the other or—much less probably—a draw. But the result turned out to be nothing so simple. There was indeed a victory, and a corresponding defeat—but was that the whole result, or even the most important part of it? For out of the welter of contending nations, a new Power had arisen, of which no one had dreamed in 1914, and which might not inconceivably be destined to play the part of the owls in the mythical battle between the frogs and the mice. Russia, Holy Russia, had hauled down the Double Eagle of Pan-Slavist Nationalism, and hoisted in its stead the bloody ensign of universal class war. It was a war without frontiers—the proletariat, the Have-Nots of the Eastern half of Europe and the Northern half of Asia, had risen and utterly overwhelmed the Haves. And they were calling on the Have-Nots of all peoples, nations, and languages, to rise and follow their example. It was by no means certain that the appeal would fall on deaf ears.

Certainly the rulers of the rest of Europe were fully alive to the peril. Germany, in her wartime desperation, had played a recklessly dangerous game when she had inoculated Russia with the person of that then obscure revolutionary, Lenin, as if he were a plague germ. The experiment had indeed succeeded beyond the wildest hopes of its authors, but the worst of warfare by bacilli is that there are no means of

limiting it. It became a question of whether Germany herself was not destined to succumb to the infection she had spread. And not only Germany. There were ominous phenomena even in the victor nations. French warships, sent to the Black Sea, hoisted the red flag. In Italy it appeared doubtful whether the forces of law and order—wielded as they were by unrespected politicians—were strong enough to cope with the visibly increasing strength of revolutionary Communism. And then—most ominous of all—the new Republic of Hungary, after a few months of uneasy Liberalism, gave it up and went Bolshevik—the beginning, perhaps, of a European landslide. Who could tell?

There in Russia, the very stronghold of faith and privilege, the thing had been done with such absurd ease. That unassuming gentleman, with the dome forehead and cruel slit eyes, whom Germany had presented to Russia, had, on possessing himself of the visible insignia of government—a feat easy enough for any minority that knew its own mind—done two very simple and, as it seemed after the event, obvious things. He told the peasants, who had from time immemorial hungered for earth more than bread, that they could now go up and possess themselves of their lords' estates, all over Russia. That was henceforward the law. And joyfully, all over Russia, the peasants availed themselves of the permission. Nay more, they would henceforth be united, as one man, against any faction that threatened to disturb this equitable arrangement.

The second thing that Lenin did was to liquidate those promises to pay by which the civilization, called Capitalist, was bound together. Money was paper. Lenin had the printing presses, and used them, instead of taxation, to balance his Budgets. It was merely a matter of printing fast enough and with enough noughts. And once the Haves were deprived of land and their money became wastepaper—what had they any longer, but life? And even this they were

not likely to keep for long, or to find worth the keeping.

It was not enough for Lenin to have changed the insignificance of a pamphleteering agitator for the virtual dictatorship of all the Russias. Nothing less would satisfy him than a world empire of Communism. The name and doctrine of Karl Marx should be honoured as those of Christ and even God had never been—and Lenin was Marx's prophet. He must often, in his meditations in the Kremlin, have turned his thoughts to England, that had given him a home and the freedom of her national library in his struggling days. What were the odds on England going Bolshevik? For well might Capitalist civilization echo the refrain,

Who stands if England falls?

It was certainly in England's favour, from Lenin's standpoint, that she had the largest industrial proletariat, in proportion to her rural population, of any nation in the world. This had only to become fully class conscious, in the Marxian sense, to have the rest of the community at its mercy. There would be nothing to prevent the revolution being brought about by a simple vote. Less than in any other community was there the inertia of a naturally conservative peasantry to be overcome. To be industrially top-heavy was to be ripe for Bolshevism, if the tree was capable of bearing such fruit.

That was the vital question. For this particular tree was of ancient growth, and struck deeper roots than probably even a Lenin could realize. What did it matter that conditions in England were favourable to Bolshevism, if the English temperament and tradition were incurably unbolshevistic? The intransigence of ruthlessness, which is the real essence of Bolshevism, is something from which the good-natured and cautious Englishman is temperamentally averse. The purge of a violent revolution is not for him. He is naturally suspicious of the man who bids

him destroy his existing temples in order to build them up in three days on some perfectly new plan—especially if that plan happens to be of foreign origin. For the mere fact that a scheme emanates from foreigners, and especially from hairy Russians, is enough to brand it in his eyes as an inferior product.

This is not to say that there was no chance or prospect of a British revolution. But the Englishman, if he overturns his social order, will never do so Bolshevistically. He will be scrupulous not to let his right hand know what his left hand doeth. He will use daggers and speak none. He will talk of acting constitutionally even if he is using the Constitution to overthrow the Constitution. He will employ the means without willing, or at least acknowledging the end. He will repudiate cold-blooded expropriation, and yet talk decorously of a Capital Levy that would, in practice, work out to much the same thing. He will pledge his allegiance to Parliamentary government, and yet support a general strike whose success would have the effect of its overthrow. He will avow his strict constitutionalism in seeking to establish a dictatorship, of the right or the left, by Act of Parliament.

In short the Englishman, though he will never envisage revolution, may not inconceivably slide into it. But he will never achieve the drive or the thoroughness of the pure-blooded Bolshevik. He has no philosophy of revolution. You will never get him to enthuse for the gospel of Karl Marx, or to see everything in terms of the class war. You will only too easily get him to believe that his boss is doing him down, in this or that concrete instance. But tell him that property is robbery, or that the bosses in general are misappropriating the fruits of labour, and, though he may agree with you, he will not be really interested. Still less will he carry his revolutionary fervour to the logical extreme of becoming regicide or antichrist.

It is a fact not without significance, that the nearest approaches to revolutionary intransigence in the

British Isles come from the so-called Celtic fringe. The Celt gravitates to extremes as the Anglo-Saxon does to compromise. That is one reason why the Englishman has never been able to understand or govern Ireland. And we shall find the least sterile British soil for the planting of the Bolshevik seed not in England, but in the valleys of South Wales and on the banks of the Clyde; though even here the revolutionary product would pass in Red Russia as something hopelessly pink and Menshevik. There is probably not a town or village from John o' Groats to Land's End, that would not cheer itself hoarse at a visit from the Prince of Wales.

Even before the War there had been a widespread attempt to acclimatize extremist doctrines in England. The revolutionary fashion then was not Bolshevism, that had not been heard of, but Syndicalism, a less formidable and constructive product, tending to degenerate into sabotage and anarchy. The respectable English version of this was Guild Socialism, never a very clearly defined ideal, the essence of which was to replace Parliamentary government by that of federated Trades Unions, expanded so as to include every sort of manual and intellectual worker.

Considerable progress had been made towards imparting a fighting spirit to the Trades Unions, by engineering what was virtually a revolt against the cautious leadership of their executives. The shop-stewards' movement was much to the fore about the time of the War, and consisted in organizing little vortices of extremism in the works, on the principle that such local leaven would eventually leaven the whole lump.

Such was the state of things in the Labour world when the astonishing phenomenon of Bolshevism burst upon it. How would British labour react to so unprecedented a stimulus? Lenin and the stalwarts of Bolshevism were not unnaturally optimistic. And among those, in England, who had anything to lose, there were great searchings of heart. Was there any

reason why the British working man should not take the hint from his mates in Leningrad and Moscow, and do for himself what had been done so easily over there?

And yet, paradoxically enough, the spectacle of triumphant Bolshevism was destined to act less as a stimulus than a brake on the movement to the left. Apart from the fact of the revolution having been made in Russia, there were features of it calculated to excite not emulation, but distrust and repulsion, even among the workers themselves. It had started with the shameful flight of the Russian armies and the collapse of the whole Eastern Allied front. It had been followed by a peace that had left Russia's allies in the lurch, and the unloosing of the German armies on those of England and France in what, but for the American intervention, might have proved overwhelming strength. Even a working man turned soldier does not thank the comrade who abandons him in face of a common enemy.

There were other features of Bolshevism that left an even deeper impression on the minds of Englishmen. The stories of Russian atrocities might be in as much need of sifting as those about the Germans in Belgium, but it was apparent that the story of the Revolution had been one of a horror almost unimaginable. The Tartar element in the Muscovite had displayed itself in a grotesque and fantastic cruelty. It is perhaps a psychological ineptitude to concentrate attention on the woes of royalty, but it is one as old as, and older than, the Elizabethans, and there can be no doubt that the cold-blooded murder not only of the Tsar and his Consort, but of their sick boy, their innocent daughters, their doctor, and those three good and faithful servants who had remained with them to the last, was the worst possible advertisement for Bolshevism. And then when Christianity itself was proscribed and persecuted, as it had not been in Europe since the days of the Cæsars, English piety, or respectability, was profoundly shocked. Some of the

most uncompromising left wing leaders, notably Mr. George Lansbury, were devout Christians, and the working man, even when he did not frequent Church or Chapel, had seldom any active hostility towards either.<sup>1</sup> These Bolsheviki, who martyred their Bishops and paraded God and Christ as guys through the streets, were undoubtedly going too far. It is not only in Capitalist circles, in England, that the taboo is honoured of "Such and such things are not done."

Moreover, as time went on, it became evident that whatever else had eventuated in Russia, it was not a working man's Utopia, or anything like it. Not only murder, but famine, stalked the land. Piteous appeals were made for help for the millions of peasants who were perishing of hunger, or its accompanying diseases. And even in the towns, the Russian worker was being fed on a diet mainly consisting of promises, while his material standard of living was incomparably *inferior to that of the most sweated worker in Capitalist England*. Moreover, if he claimed the sacred right of withholding his labour, he would be liable to be exterminated like any Grand Duke. All of which things might be explained away as necessary, or temporary, or the result of Capitalist aggression. But they too formed a very bad advertisement for Bolshevism. The hundred-per-cent Communist state had once been a beautiful dream; now it was a ghastly reality.

It need hardly be said that the reaction of the upper and middle classes to Bolshevism was, from the first, one of almost unanimous horror and hostility. The very term Bolshevik became one of abuse—among the worst that could, with decency, be applied to a fellow human being. The least suspicion of sympathy with Lenin—or even the courtesy of prefixing his name with a "Monsieur"—was enough to brand anyone as a socially undesirable personage.

The result was that all sense of proportion was lost,

<sup>1</sup> Except perhaps as a matter of sectarian rivalry.



and policy towards Russia was at first the blind product of emotional reaction. A sane Machiavellianism might have esteemed the course of events in Russia as a godsend for England. A victorious Tsardom, with Constantinople and the Straits in its possession, would have been hardly less formidable to England than a victorious Germany. The only conceivable way of staving off the always threatened revolution would have been by a policy of Pan-Slavist Imperialism, culminating in another war. There can have been little doubt that the Bear, the bugbear of Queen Victoria and her statesmen, would once again have turned hungry eyes on India—not to speak of the Persian Gulf. A bear larger and more terrible than ever before.

But now, for the time being, Russia, as a military power, had ceased to be formidable. There was no longer any question of her having Constantinople; she was more landlocked than ever without the Baltic seaboard that her great Peter had conquered; without Poland, without Bessarabia, without Finland. Persia had slipped from her grasp, and in the Far East Japan could flout her with impunity. For a long time to come, all her energies would be required for the building up of her new social order at home. Her Red Army would have its hands fully occupied in safeguarding the revolution, and if it was launched in any direction, it would be Westward, for the recovery of the lost territories. Until that was accomplished, there need be no fear of Cossacks in the Himalayas.

It was, then, with almost unbelievable ineptitude, that Russia's former allies lent themselves to the project of crushing Bolshevism, by supporting the Counter-revolutionary armies that trudged forlornly through the vast spaces of Russia in the attempt to restore something more or less resembling the old order, and whose first task, after this happy consummation, would avowedly have been to restore the old frontiers. If the lesson of the French Revolution had

not been wholly forgotten, it would have been realized that this was the surest way to consolidate the threatened régime. But Mr. Churchill, who had been appointed War Minister in Mr. Lloyd George's Government, and to whom the whole of life presented itself as one prolonged game of soldiers, was enthusiastic for the ending of Bolshevism by military coercion. Indeed, it would appear from his book on the "*World Crisis*," that his ideal solution would have been, instead of disarming the German host, to have enlisted it in a fresh war or grand, European crusade, against England's former ally.<sup>1</sup> But as this did not happen to be practical politics, and as any attempt to employ Allied troops in the invasion of Russia would certainly have ended in mutiny, there was nothing for it but to finance civil war at the expense of the British taxpayer. Mr. Lloyd George, on the other hand, desired nothing better than to get out of the mess by one of his many improvisations. It would be a grand idea to have a meeting between all the contending factions on a Turkish island. Unfortunately, like a former Welsh wizard, Mr. Lloyd George discovered that the spirits would not come when he did call for them. And then there was a still stranger episode of an American journalist going as a sort of informal ambassador to the Bolsheviks, and being disavowed when it turned out that his activities were not likely to be popular.

The armies of the Counter-revolution, alternately munitioned, lectured, and neglected, by the Western victors, petered out in the hopeless attempt to succeed where Napoleon and Charles XII, in all their glory, had failed. It was an agony of competitive fiendishness, only ennobled by the military genius of Trotsky, the Carnot of the Soviets. But it served to establish the new order on what were, for the time being, impregnable foundations.

Meanwhile, to the average British consciousness, Bolshevism had become less of a reality than a myth.

<sup>1</sup> Vol 5, pp. 24-5.

In clubs and country houses the thing had expanded into a universal conspiracy to overthrow everything, a conspiracy in which the highly respectable leaders of British Labour were somehow darkly involved. As in the days of the French Revolution, the voice of the amateur detective was heard in the land, exposing the awful activities of Freemasons, Dark Lodges, Satanists, Illuminati, Occultists, and Kabbalists. One of the most popular horrors was a document that had originally been concocted, for its own doubtless sufficient purposes, by the Tsarist Secret Police, and bore, as its imposing title, *The Protocol of the Elders of Zion*. These amiable old gentlemen were apparently actuated by the same disinterested love of evil as the school bully of Victorian fiction, only their proceedings were far more complicated, so complicated, in fact, that it was hard indeed for the plain man to grasp what precisely it was they were up to, except that it was something so horrible as to congeal the blue blood of the great Duke of Northumberland, and to disturb the slumbers of many a good old lady with visions of Mr. Ramsay Macdonald and Mr. J. H. Thomas stropping knives in cellars, and swearing to avenge the death of Jacques du Molay, Grand Master of the Temple.

There was one feature of this propaganda that was far from comic. The evil growth that on the Continent was known as Anti-Semitism, and had produced such fruit as that of the Russian pogroms and the French Dreyfus scandal, had not hitherto struck root on British soil. It had, at most, been a fad of those genial writers, Mr. Belloc and Mr. Chesterton, and nobody, not even the Jews themselves, had greeted their sallies with anything but a tolerant chuckle. Now, however, the fact that no small part of the brains of Bolshevism had been supplied by Jews—no very surprising phenomenon in view of the treatment they had received at Tsarist hands—created a disposition, in certain circles, to see the Jew as the author of all evil, and to hanker for the inclusion of Jew-

baiting among British sports and pastimes. But the common sense and even the humour of Englishmen might be trusted to keep this obsession from developing into worse than a minor nuisance.

In Labour circles, the myth of Bolshevism took a precisely opposite form. It was instinctively felt that the spectacle of Capitalism overthrown and the principles of Socialism triumphant, was too valuable an asset not to be made the most of. The feelings of many, if not most, British Labour leaders towards the Bolsheviks were probably not altogether dissimilar to those of a husband *de convenance*, who, though he is profoundly conscious of disliking his consort, feels that now he cannot get rid of her he has got to make the best of her. The task was not sweetened by the fact that the Bolsheviks themselves seldom troubled to disguise their dislike and contempt of these moderates, who, it was quite evident, would be the first to be put up against a wall on the triumph of the new régime.

"We shall support MacDonald," as Trotsky was reported to have phrased it, with his customary urbanity, during the General Strike, "as the rope supports a hanged man."

There was, indeed, a band of real Communists in England, who made up in ferocity what they lacked in numbers. They were prolific of usually short-lived periodicals, published by obscure presses, and known principally by the quotation of their juiciest tit-bits in the organs of the extreme Right. They would be adorned by pictures of globular directors, with the diminutive top-hats that were for some reason prescribed as the insignia of Capitalism, being assaulted in various ways by workmen of ruffianly appearance. Sometimes the technique was extremely good—there was a certain "Espoir" who is fairly entitled to rank among the most forcible of Post-war cartoonists, in spite of the fact that his skill was exercised at the expense of his Sovereign, his Saviour and his Sovereign's heir.

There was song too, appropriate to the few Gilbertian Sunday schools whose existence, attested from time to time, led to shocked enquiries—whatever were the authorities doing to allow such goings on? Treble voices would pipe in chorus such strains as :

Kings and queens and flunkys,  
 Lords and dukes and knights,  
 Are the Fat Man's magic  
 To cheat you of your rights.  
 Get a pail and drown them,  
 Or a little can . . ."

or :

Farewell my master,  
 Farewell to you,  
 We're all gone red, and so  
 You may look blue !

or again :

There is a Church in the town, in the town,  
 Where the parson often plays the clown, plays the clown.

But Bolshevism was never destined to get a grip on any section of the British people. It was a nine days' wonder when a solitary Communist got elected for a constituency in Lanarkshire—though the same thing had happened in a Yorkshire constituency before the War. But Communism, naked and unashamed, was destined to fluctuate between a Parliamentary membership of one and none at all, and a Communist candidate, even in the poorest constituency, might account himself lucky if he secured the eighth of the total vote needed to save his deposit.

The triumph of Bolshevism in Russia was destined, in the long run, to prove not a stimulus, but a serious handicap, to the advance of Socialism in England. The mere suspicion of sympathy with Moscow, the early coquettings of English Labour with the Soviets—the "People's Soviets" as the leading Labour organ, *The Daily Herald*, called them—was enough to panic the electorate. It was alleged that Moscow had been subsidizing *The Herald*, and a telegram was inter-

cepted from M. Litvinoff, the Soviet envoy at Copenhagen, in which he boasted that *The Herald* acted "as if it were our organ." It was only natural that the opponents of Labour should have done their utmost to advertise every such indiscretion, and the Party certainly did lay itself open to the imputation that it regarded the Bolsheviks in the light of comrades and, at any rate, potential allies.

This impression was greatly strengthened by the intervention of the Labour Party in the Polish crisis that developed in the summer of 1920. The resurrection of Poland, the righting of a wrong that had poisoned international relationships for more than a century, had, to good Europeans, been the most hopeful outcome of the Great War. With the menace from the East revived in the form of Bolshevism, Poland had become the buffer state of Western civilization, and her preservation a matter of supreme importance. If she were to collapse, that would bring Bolshevism to the frontiers of Germany, and go far towards realizing Lenin's dream of a Socialist Soviet Europe.

Could Poland preserve the freedom that had been won for her? Her Eastern frontier was completely undetermined, and there seemed no very obvious way of fixing it except by force of arms. It is true that the British Foreign Office had drawn a line on the map beyond which it did not desire the Poles to expand, but neither party concerned took any more notice of this gesture than the tide did of Canute. As the campaigning season of 1920 approached, the Red armies, having disposed of their Counter-revolutionary opponents, began to concentrate in the West, and the Poles, who were by no means minded to wait upon their enemy's convenience, dashed forward to get their blow in first. There followed a campaign of little bloodshed and surprising vicissitudes. It was not long before numbers told, and the Polish armies were being chased, for hundreds of miles, to the outskirts of Warsaw. And the Russians were demanding

terms that would have had the effect of reducing Poland to the status of the Ukraine or Georgia in the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.

Mr. Lloyd George's Government cut a singularly undignified figure. It clung desperately to its ideal dividing line. It enjoined the Poles to retreat on this, which they only did when they were driven. It threatened the Russians with war if they should pass it, which they promptly proceeded to do. It promised aid to the Poles, which was never forthcoming. Mr. Lloyd George, on receiving the first news of the Russian terms, conveniently doctored, hastened to express his sense of their generosity, and found himself compelled to eat his words. It mattered little, either in Poland or Russia, whether he approved or not.

But it was sufficiently evident that military assistance to Poland was, at least, in contemplation, and that England might wake up one morning and find herself committed to a war with Russia. It was at this point that the Labour Party decided to throw its weight into the scale. War with the Soviets must be prevented at all costs, and by any means, constitutional or otherwise. A Council of Action was formed, to devise ways and means of paralysing any warlike activity that Parliament or the King's Ministers might authorize. A general strike was the method envisaged by some of the more intransigent spirits, but the majority leaned towards a refusal to lend a hand to the transport of troops or munitions.

The Council of Action was never called upon to act. While the British Government was trying to make up its mind whether to help the Poles or not, the French dispatched one man to Warsaw, and changed defeat into victory. That man was Foch's old chief-of-the-staff, Weygand, who at once perceived that here was the situation of the Marne over again, with an incomparably less formidable enemy. There was a quick concentration to a flank, a sudden counter-attack, and the terrible Red Army was on the run even faster than the Poles had been. Some sur-

rendered; some poured across the East Prussian frontier; a remnant showed a clean pair of heels. Never had an issue so momentous—and this was truly described as the *Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World*—been settled with such a minimum of bloodshed. England never ceased to offer good advice to the Poles, who had other things to think about. Over and far beyond the sacred "Curzon" line they hunted the unhappy Reds, and the spectacle was soon witnessed of the small nation dictating a humiliating peace to the big one, and settling down comfortably behind frontiers that roped in several million Russians, Ukrainians and Ruthenians.

Meanwhile the Labour Party's contemplated veto had been far from unpopular even among its opponents. Any stick was good enough to beat the dogs of war. The very idea of fighting so stunk in the nostrils of the average Englishman, that he was determined not to be drawn into it again on any excuse.

Accordingly he was blind to the revolutionary implications of this new departure. An attempt of one party or class to impose its will, by direct action, on the nation, or its lawful Government, was the principle of Bolshevism. It was certain that such respectable politicians as the leaders of English Labour were no more habituated than other Englishmen to envisage the logical consequences of their actions. But it might not be so easy to avoid them. Even if they were unwilling to make further trial of this new engine of compulsion, there would be irresistible pressure from behind to compel them.

Moreover, an association had been established in the popular mind between Labour and Bolshevism that was destined to be a source of acute embarrassment, and, in fact, to prove fatal to the first Labour Government.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE WAR OF IRISH INDEPENDENCE

The problem of the class war was not the only one whose solution had been merely postponed by the international struggle. There was that of Ireland, which proved to be of even more immediate urgency. For, by the irony of fate, the mighty victor who had starved out Germany and annihilated her overseas empire, was to prove incapable even of maintaining his hold on the second of his own British Isles.

Fixed and frozen by the icy genius of Parnell, Irish patriotism had been sharpened to a fine point of determination to achieve freedom at any cost, and by any means. Such a purpose could only have been defeated by a corresponding determination of England to hold her conquest in the same iron grip as, for instance, Russia had held Poland before the War, and Italy was to hold Austrian Tyrol after it. But England would have had to change her nature and cut herself loose from her past to function as a despotism or a tyranny. It might have been arguable that Ireland would have thriven and prospered without any nonsense about representative institutions, under the rule of a Viceroy, supported by irresistible military force, and inspired by Cromwell's motto, "nor what they like, but what is good for them." But that is emphatically one of the things that, as the English put it, is not done.

The result was that even when English statesmen talked of resolute, they practised representative government. They did not allow the Irish to have a Parliament of their own, but they introduced them,

grossly over-represented, into the English Parliament, which they proceeded to stultify and, on occasion, to dominate. The net result of their proceedings, by the time of the War, had been to bring the august name of Parliament into a contempt and disrepute that would have been inconceivable to the contemporaries of Macaulay and John Russell.

That the Union would have to go sooner or later, and the sooner the better, ought to have been as obvious to all Englishmen as it became to the not quite disinterested intelligence of Gladstone in 1886. But just to sever the connection with a clean cut and a superb gesture was not quite so simple as Gladstone imagined. It involved, in the first place, the abandonment of the mostly English landowning community, to the tender mercies of a peasantry that regarded them much as the Russian moujiks regarded their boyars. This obstacle the Conservative Party, with the wise illogicality of Englishmen, proceeded to minimize by a comprehensive policy of buying the landlords out, or withdrawing the English garrison. And to withdraw one's garrison from a hostile country is an obvious preliminary to evacuation.

But there was a more serious obstacle to a completely independent Ireland. Ireland was not one nation, but two, and the smaller nation, the Protestant community of the North-East, was as fiercely determined to be free of the Catholics, as the Catholics were to be free of England. Every argument for Irish Home Rule was equally cogent for Protestant self-determination. And every argument for an undivided Ireland was equally an argument for the United Kingdom.

It is the supreme proof of the poison with which the Act of Union had inoculated British politics, that of the two great English parties before the War, one should have committed itself to denying Catholic Ireland the right to choose its own form of government, and the other to forcing the Protestants, willy-nilly, under the heels of the Catholics.

This latter was the minimum price at which the Irish would sell their support to the Liberal Caucus, when the only alternative to that support was humiliating defeat on a bitterly-contested party issue. And so the Liberal Party had committed itself to the desperate and illiberal venture of driving the Protestants out of The Union, and imposing an alien rule on a people who, in the Gladstonian sense, were rightly struggling to be free. The Protestant counties had reacted to this as the American colonies had to George III's—who after all did not profess to be a Liberal—"rebels must be made to obey." They stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army, and though horrified Liberals fulminated and shrieked at them in the language of the most reactionary Toryism, it soon became evident that they had not the resolution, even if they had had the power, to enforce their law in the teeth of their principles. Even if there had been no pistol shot at Serajevo, there would have been no storming of Belfast.

But the dragon's teeth had been sown, and not in one part of Ireland only. When the War broke out, the island contained not only two nations, and two Nationalisms, equally intransigent, but also two national armies. All over Ireland the Catholics had begun to arm and drill on the Protestant model. Even while the hosts of Europe were marshalling for Armageddon, the first shots had been fired in an Irish war of independence.

That war was dramatically suspended. For one golden moment it seemed as if the miracle had come about of an Irish nation, spontaneously united in one common patriotism. Mr. John Redmond, the Irish Nationalist leader, was not a genius of Parnell's calibre, but at this time of crisis he showed himself capable of acting in the spirit of a great and chivalrous gentleman. Frankly, generously, he made the offer of Ireland's support for the Allied cause. He encouraged his countrymen to volunteer. Protestant and Catholic Irishmen took the field side by side.

They fraternized. Redmond's gallant brother, sixty years of age, fell at the head of his men. He was borne from the field by an Ulster ambulance.

But England, with this opportunity miraculously presented to her, knew not the hour of her visitation. Buckets of official cold water were sedulously poured on the fire that Redmond had sought to kindle. The War Office knew nothing and cared less about Irish patriotism. Even the suggestion that the shamrock should be worn as a symbol, was turned down as too irregular for words. Redmond had gambled in the response that never came. He and his party were ruined. The fires of Irish patriotism found another and more sinister outlet.

The men of fighting age who had remained at home—and they were many—now embraced the fierce and bitter Nationalism that went under the significant name of Sinn Fein, or "Ourselves alone", one that might well have served for the whole spirit of anarchic egotism that was dragging the world to ruin. Henceforth there was to be but one mind in all these patriots—and it was against England.

English rule, under the auspices of that amiable dilettante, Augustine Birrell, was as feeble as it was unimaginative. The situation was allowed to drift into open rebellion, that missed fire in the provinces, but was only put down after days of savage fighting in the capital. The situation might yet have been saved, but for the supreme ineptitude of allowing the officer in charge of the troops to take matters into his own hands, and have the leaders of the insurrection brought out day after day in batches to be shot. Sinn Fein could have asked for nothing better than this free gift of martyrs.

The situation was now definitely out of control. Nothing could henceforth prevent Sinn Fein from capturing the heart and will of Catholic Ireland. And no power on earth would induce the Protestant North to lie down beneath the yoke of a Sinn Fein Parliament. An independent Ireland meant two Irelands.

English statesmen, of all parties, were by this time eager to be rid of the Irish incubus on any terms that would save the face of England and satisfy Ireland. But nothing would satisfy Sinn Fein except to kick England bag and baggage out of the island, and to force its own yoke on the Protestants. The departure of the last English soldier would thus have been the signal for a civil and religious war that would have deluged Ireland in blood.

Desperately the King's harassed Ministers sought for a way out. The inevitable Wizard was called in to conjure up a settlement, but his magic left matters worse than before. A convention of representative Irishmen was assembled to settle Ireland's destinies, but Sinn Fein refused to have anything to do with it, and the Protestants returned a stubborn negative to the idea of a United Ireland. You might more hopefully look for a snake than a compromise on Irish soil.

But Britain was destined to crown her record of ineptitude by one supreme and monstrous blunder. In the year 1918, when the last great German offensive was at its height and it seemed as if there were but a step between the Allied cause and ruin, a new measure of conscription was passed whose provisions were extended to Ireland. It was a human enough error, for Ireland had thriven and prospered while England was being bled white—but anyone who knew the Irish temperament might have predicted that the mere suggestion of such a thing would have started an uncontrollable agitation. No attempt was made to implement the grievance that Mr. Lloyd George's Government, in the delirium of war fever, had been feckless enough to legalize. Fortunately for the Allied command, not one of the many young men who, unable to emigrate, remained at more or less of a loose end in their native villages, was called to the service for which Englishmen in the fifties, and those who had been patched up after repeated wounds, were conscripted without mercy. Ireland continued to be

the little oasis of material prosperity she had been throughout the War. But the iron had entered into her soul. The insolence of her big sister's demand had finally united all classes of the Catholic community in support of Sinn Féin, including the majority of the ecclesiastics themselves, in spite of the very name "*ourselves alone*" being the direct negation of all that Christ and Mother Church had ever stood for. The result was seen in the election of 1918, when the old Nationalist Party was practically wiped out and—though not without a certain use of intimidation—a body of 73 uncompromising Republicans was returned to a Parliament in which they scorned to sit.

Here then was the situation at the close of the War. Catholic Ireland was plainly determined to be free and mistress of the Protestants within her gates. The Protestants were determined to die under the Union Jack rather than to sacrifice one inch of their own corner of Ireland to Catholic domination. And England? Was she, in the flush of victory, to allow the snapping of bonds that had held since the days of Strongbow, and consent to the partition of the British Isles? Yet what else could she do, or, if she could, afford to do? For Ireland was no longer to be symbolized as a jewel in her crown, but as a malignant tumour that must at all costs be cut out of her social body.

Not the least serious feature of the whole situation was the poisoning of the relations between England and the United States. The cornerstone of any sane foreign policy lay in co-operation between the two great Anglo-Saxon Powers. But the powerful and intensely Anglophobe Irish community in the States was a perpetual generator of hatred and suspicion, and would never relax its efforts so long as England continued to force her rule on an unwilling Ireland. There were even high, and not altogether unreasonable hopes, that one of the contending parties in the forthcoming Presidential election might angle for

the Irish vote by offering to recognize Ireland's independence.

But assuming that England remained firm in her determination to hold what she held? Her people had no heart for further fighting. Her old regular army had practically ceased to exist—its ranks were filled with unblooded boys. Her resources were strained to the verge of bankruptcy—to finance a military effort on any considerable scale would break her. And what end could there be to such a war short of exterminating or enslaving the whole Irish people? Or what respite, save by such a tyranny as the Fascists were destined to set up in the Southern Tyrol? And if anything could be certain, it was that the English people, so long as it retained its own liberties, would never be party to tyranny, naked and ruthless, on the other side of the Irish Channel.

No such sentimental inhibitions hampered Sinn Féin in completing the work that Parnell had begun, and carrying to final victory the long struggle of Catholic Ireland to shake off the English yoke. In spite of appearances, its leaders held all the winning cards, and where they scrupled to enforce the full rigour of the game, their followers took the matter out of their hands. The hour brought forth a leader of the same uncompromising temper as Parnell himself. If General Maxwell had made a disastrous blunder in shooting the fifteen leaders of the Dublin rebellion, he may perhaps have capped it in letting off the most efficient fighter of them all, on the curious ground of his American citizenship. This man was, in fact, a Spaniard with an Irish-American mother—his name Eamon de Valera. He had filled the not inappropriate post of mathematical coach. He was a completely selfless, fearless, humourless, embodiment of the Nationalist spirit in its most intransigent form. He had one aim and one ideal, that of a Republican Ireland, one and indivisible, and he pursued it with a fite of mathematical concentration, that burnt froze. Sympathy with any other point of view he had none,

and he would no more have dreamed of compromising than he would of making polite concessions in the working of an equation.

No sooner had the election showed that Catholic Ireland had committed itself definitely to the support of Sinn Fein, than the seventy-three proceeded to act as if the independence of Ireland were already an accomplished fact, and they the members of its first Parliament, or Dail Eireann. King George's headship of the State passed to President de Valera. The new State had its ministers, its officials, its foreign consuls, and its courts of law, that soon began to function with more real authority than those of the Union. It had its army, those same volunteers who had come into being as a reply to the Protestant army of the North, and who, in spite of the blood-bath at Dublin, had continued to arm and drill with a minimum of interference. It was this army that, in the words of one of the Sinn Fein leaders, who had exchanged his plain English name of Charles Burgess for the resounding style of Cathal Brugha, "were entitled, morally and legally, when in the execution of their duty, to slay the officials and agents of the foreign invader who was waging war upon our native Government."<sup>1</sup>

The rest followed with the inevitable sequence of one of those mathematical problems that the President must often have worked out on the blackboard. The strength of England's rule in Ireland lay in her efficient, though none too gentle, force of Irish police. This force must now be eliminated. The newly-elected President, after denouncing them as spies, janissaries, and brutal traitors against their own people, demanded their complete social ostracism. Like the mathematical coach he was, he did not trouble to work out the detailed application of his formula.

The business of eliminating the police, and other "officials and agents of a foreign government," was organized by leaders who were not slow in rising from

<sup>1</sup> *De Valera*, by Denis Gwynn, p. 67.



the ranks of a people brought up in the traditions of the Land League. The most brilliant of Ireland's Pre-war dramatists had showed how, in a typical peasant village, a man might become a hero on the strength of having murdered his own father. On this scale of values, the murderer of a policeman might qualify for a hero of heroes. The business went quietly, deliberately forward. It had the advantage of being almost entirely safe. The eliminators could bide their time, and no one would dare, even if he were willing, to give evidence against them. No isolated policeman was safe for a moment. Even after he had just risen from his knees before the Altar he might be put out of existence in the open street. In the midst of life he was in death. And even if he lived he was an outcast, a pariah among his own people. The shops were closed to him. Any girl who dared to be seen associating with him would, as likely as not, be seized by men, who would take a leaf out of the book of Belgian patriots by cutting off her hair close to her head.

The casualties may not have been heavy in proportion to the numbers of the force, but this constant, remorseless pressure would have been enough to demoralize and ruin any body of men in the world. It was only a question of time before the Royal Irish Constabulary would be unable either to obtain fresh recruits or to retain the allegiance of its existing members. There is a point beyond which professional loyalty, without the stimulus of patriotism, cannot be strained. It appeared to be checkmate for England.

Mr. Lloyd George's Government was not yet, however, at the end of its resources. It is true that since the failure of the Irish to settle their differences between themselves, it had almost resigned itself to letting these impracticable islanders stew in their own juice. But something had to be done, or a year after the formal conclusion of peace the old, discredited Home Rule Bill would have come automatically into

operation, with its single Parliament and consequent subjugation of the Protestants. So an Act was introduced, and passed in 1920, that at last recognized the reality of a divided Ireland, and set up two Home Rule, but not independent, Parliaments, one for the four Protestant together with two other counties in which the populations were hopelessly mixed, and the other for the rest of Ireland. The fiction of a United Ireland was duly honoured by that of a Council of Ireland, which either party could, and the Protestants of course did, prevent from coming into existence by the simple process of contracting out of it.

Two things were now established; first that the Union was dead, next that the Six Counties would never, except by their own consent, be joined with the rest. For reasonable men, it would only have remained to settle on what terms Catholic Ireland should set up house for herself. It was not likely that England, having gone so far, would have refused anything that did not involve a formal secession from the Commonwealth of Nations or the sacrifice of the Protestants—who were not likely, in any case, to prove accommodating victims.

But no considerations of mere expediency could deflect the mathematician, turned President, from the perfect solution of his problem. It would not be right for Ireland to be anything but independent and indivisible. Although she could nowhere dream of putting up the slightest resistance in the field to the British army, and though not a single town or village dared openly abjure its allegiance to King George, Sinn Féin must needs dictate its terms to England, to be swallowed whole or not at all, as the Allies had dictated *theirs* to Germany. So there was nothing for it but for England to break the forces of Irish patriotism in order to achieve Home Rule for Ireland.

The whole history of war records no more extraordinary episode than this War of Irish Independence. It had none of the glamour or chivalry by which the natural beastliness of war is apt to be masked. There

were no battles, no sieges, and if there were heroes, their courage was of the sort that does not fail gunmen or gangsters. Lowell had, perhaps rhetorically, defined war as murder. This war answered to the definition in the most literal sense, for the striking force with which Ireland challenged the whole might of the British Empire consisted of no more than some 2,000 full-time gunmen, with the volunteers as a sort of civilian reserve, available for such local operations as that of overwhelming policemen in outlying barracks.

But the power of the 2,000, ruthlessly applied, was enough to make the situation utterly impossible for the English occupation. What did it matter that the troops held all the towns and could go unchallenged wherever they liked? They were as helpless as the hosts of Pharaoh to stay the hand of the destroying angel. They could not surround every policeman all the time with a ring of protecting steel; they could not mount guard over every house inhabited by an English loyalist; they could not prevent high officials from being murdered in their clubs, old gentlemen from being dragged out of tram cars and riddled with bullets, they could not even protect their own officers in their beds. So far from the terror tending to diminish, it waxed ever more deadly as its leaders gained experience. No Chicago gangster ever showed greater ingenuity in putting his enemies on the spot than a young man of engaging personality, an ex-postal official, Michael Collins, who quickly rose to the position of fighting or—more accurately—killing chief of the insurrection.

What was the Government to do? English rule in Ireland was being steadily rendered impossible. There was no objective to capture; no enemy in the field at whom to strike; only an ostensibly peaceful and friendly population. And yet in a short time Dublin Castle would find itself without a police or any means of asserting its authority. Over Catholic Ireland at least, Sinn Fein would be the *de facto* Government, unchallenged except within actual rifle range of the

nearest troops, and able to visit the least opposition to its authority with death, in its most terrifying form of secret assassination.

Mr. Lloyd George, it must be remembered, was a master of improvisation. He had tried to improvise a settlement, and failed. He had now to improvise a method of what he himself called getting murder by the throat. The number of active murderers was not formidable, but the crux of the problem lay in the fact that, either through patriotism, or terror, or both, they were aided and comforted by practically the entire population. The answer of any belligerent to this, in time of war, would be to visit, on the local population, the penalty of outrages committed in its midst, and, in fact, to answer terror by an even greater counter-terror. But was this war? And if not—what was it?

In any case, the authorities had to consider whether, and how, to support their own police. For the policeman is a human being, and when he finds himself marked down for assassination, he is unlikely to take it in good part. Even the English soldiers were not always to be prevented from avenging outrages committed on themselves and their officers, though their strict discipline made such outbreaks extremely rare. How much less were hot-blooded Irish constables to be kept to the strict principles of the Sermon on the Mount. But they too were men under authority and with a tradition of discipline.

It was different when it became a question of reinforcing the police. This was urgently necessary, and Ireland had practically ceased to be a possible recruiting ground. But there was excellent fighting material at hand in the shape of demobilized young men who had become habituated to the violence and excitement of war, and to whom a peaceful existence was proving intolerably flat. These included one picked, mobile force called the Auxiliaries, recruited entirely from ex-officers, but the rank and file of them

were called, from the colour of their uniforms, by a name that was to gather more sinister associations than those of Clavense's dragoons and Kirke's Lambs. They were the Black and Tans.

Their methods would probably have seemed mild to members of Fascist Black Squadrons or Nazi Storm Troops, but to the English mind they were unprecedented and shocking. They proceeded, frankly and openly, to answer violence with violence, and terror with terror. They knew what mercy they had to expect from the patriots—in one ambush in which a party of eighteen were caught, not only were the wounded slaughtered as they lay, but even the dead bodies were mutilated with axes.<sup>1</sup> There is at least one case of death by torture on record. If that was the measure to be meted to them, they would have two eyes for an eye, and thirty-two teeth for a tooth—and they would not be too particular from whom they collected them.

It is easy, and right, to say that it was the inalienable duty of the authorities to have maintained discipline among their forces, no matter at what cost. But with the murder campaign at its height, it may well have appeared, to practical politicians, a prime necessity for the Government to back its agents through thick and thin, under such circumstances. And Mr. Lloyd George's Coalition had not come into office with the idea of doing right though the heavens fall.

Certainly it did turn a blind eye to the methods of the Counter-terror. The War of Irish Independence became a sickening competition in crime. Every outrage of the gunmen was a signal for the official guardians of the law to retaliate with lawless violence on all and sundry in the neighbourhood. Houses were burned, shops looted, creameries destroyed, evidence extracted by torture, prisoners done to death "attempting to escape," men shot without trial or orders—not even excluding priests. The second city of Ireland, Cork,

<sup>1</sup> It was alleged, as usual in such cases, that a shot had been fired after surrender.

had its best streets set on fire as remorselessly as those of Louvain had been, and its Lord Mayor—a gentleman who, by the way, had been privy to a conspiracy to murder the Viceroy—himself murdered.

The Black and Tans had been selected for their fighting and not for their moral qualities, and could not be expected to discriminate nicely between private and official ruffianism. The state of things in the force cannot be better summarized than in the words of Messrs. Collier and Lang :

“The Team spirit . . . was preserved by methods that ensure a similar uniformity of ruffianism in Chicago and New York gangs to-day.”<sup>1</sup> Even loyal British officers were not immune from murder if they were suspected of knowing too much—and nothing was done about it. So loyal was the Government to its servants, that rather than face inconvenient disclosures, even convicted Black and Tans were pardoned and reinstated, a piece of cynicism that led to the resignation of a British commander, General Crozier. It was one team of gangsters against another—a case of Capone cut Diamond. Ireland, Mr. Shaw’s priest had said before the War, was Hell. It was now Hell with all the devils let loose.

Sinn Fein had always a trump card of outrage to put on the Black and Tan ace. When an innocent priest was murdered, its gunmen retaliated by performing the same office for a couple of officers returning from a tennis party, and when the young wife of one of these begged to be allowed to die with her husband, her request—with that traditional courtesy that no Irishman ever fails to extend to a woman—was granted. The climax of horror was reached one night in Dublin, when no less than fourteen officers of the Intelligence Service, who, being engaged in tracking down murder, counted as spies, were pitilessly butchered, some of them in front of their wives. And finally a Mrs. Lindsay, an old lady who, hearing of an intended ambush, gave timely warning, was dragged

<sup>1</sup> *Just the Other Day*, p. 87.

from her home away into the mountains, and eventually murdered—according to one account, with revolting brutality. But it is only fair to say that, according to Collins, “she wasn’t murdered in cold blood, she was executed.”<sup>1</sup> Which, of course, as in the not dissimilar case of Nurse Cavell, made all the difference.

But, significantly enough, English public opinion showed no tendency to get excited about this and similar atrocities, and the neighbourhood of Trafalgar Square was spared the infliction of a Mrs. Lindsay memorial. The average Englishman had no heart in the Irish dispute, and was inclined to put the whole blame for its continuance on his own Government. Ireland was a subject on which he was an incurable sentimentalist. He had no idea of the fixed and implacable hatred that centuries of bygone oppression had fostered in the national soul against everything English. He thought of the Irish as a race of grown-up children, charming and comical and incontinently warm-hearted. The Ireland depicted by Shaw and Synge and Joyce, with its cold sneering and colder hatreds, its bitterness, its squalor, its pitiless realism, was not the sort of Ireland that he wanted to believe in, and accordingly he shut his mind’s eye to its existence. Even when policemen were being shot like mad dogs, no play was more popular in England than *Paddy the Next Best Thing*, which exploited the most luscious brand of Dear Ould Oirland sentiment. And after sheer exhaustion had at long last brought a respite to the killing and destruction, an even more luscious valse entitled *My Irish Home Sweet Home* could be sung and danced without the faintest suspicion of irony.

But though the English public may have been astray in its refusal to call a spade a spade, provided it were an Irish spade, it had a true discernment of what was or was not British. And this Black and Tan business was emphatically not. If that was the only way to preserve British rule in Ireland, it merely showed

<sup>1</sup> *Ireland for Ever*, by Brig. Gen. F. P. Crozier.

that it was not worth preserving. It might be argued that the King's forces had got murder on the run, and that no more than two or three month's ruthless pressure would now suffice for laying Collins's whole gang by the heels—or the neck. The public was unimpressed. It demanded an end now—unconditionally. Sir Hamar Greenwood, the Irish Secretary who had stood firm for a policy of backing and whitewashing the Police and Auxiliary forces, was assailed, in organs not committed to the support of the Government, with a virulence that knew no bounds, while the worst atrocities on the other side were either ignored or defended. This was illogical, as the English nature is illogical. It was unjust, as contempt of logic is apt to be. But it was the verdict passed in advance by England on Fascist or Nazi methods under her auspices. Such things were henceforth definitely in the category of Not Done.

Mr. Lloyd George had not cut a particularly dignified or popular figure in his handling of the Irish problem. He had tried conciliation, and failed. He had tried force, and failed. But he had not altogether lost that intuitive sense of popular opinion which had been one of the main causes of his success. It had become evident to him, as it had to Sir Robert Walpole on a famous occasion, that "this dance will no further go." It was time to whip off his Black and Tans, and conclude the whole matter on any terms that could be obtained. After all, events must have brought it home, even to the most intransigent Sinn Feiner, that there could be no immediate question of coercing the Protestants. These dour patriots had proved that already to demonstration. When the campaign of outrage had been started within their borders, they had risen in their fury, and shown that this was a game that they too could play, and better the instruction. Catholics by the thousand were driven out of the Belfast shipyards. There were hundreds of casualties, with a handsome balance in



favour of the Protestants. The purpose of the gunmen was baulked by one as ruthless as their own.

The Partition of Ireland, with or without the consent of Sinn Fein, became an accomplished fact on the opening of the Northern Parliament, on the 1st of June, 1921, by King George. His Majesty had already, in two great constitutional crises, shown himself the only statesman in his realm capable of working, not for a party, but for peace, and we may therefore accept as the utterance of his own heart the solemn and beautiful appeal he made, on this occasion, "to all Irishmen to pause, to stretch out the hand of forbearance and conciliation, to forgive and forget." Seldom has the spoken word been so decisive in its effect. It was felt on all hands that the time had come for ending an intolerable situation, and events moved rapidly to a formal truce, that was concluded on the 11th of the ensuing month. The hardpressed forces of Sinn Fein came out into the open and proceeded to consolidate their organization, like any regular belligerents. Nobody seriously imagined, after this, that there could henceforth be any question of enforcing British rule upon Catholic Ireland. John Bull had, to all practical intent, accepted his marching orders.

Whether or not the means be held to justify the end, history must record the fact that the War of Irish Independence had been won—though at the cost of an Ireland as definitely divided into two nations as the Spanish Peninsula. If victory consists in the breaking of the enemy will to resistance, it must be conceded to the Irish. Only a rump of incurable Diehards was prepared to pay the price of smashing Sinn Fein, and forever after holding down a nation of rebels at the bayonet's point. They understood how to do that sort of thing better abroad. But so long as Britons refuse to submit to tyranny they have to face the consequence of being debarred from practising it.

It remained to patch up a settlement that should

give the Irish the substance of their demands and save the face of the British. But those who counted on generosity had reckoned without the President. His hands had not been soiled with the necessary butcher's work of the *risorgimento*. He was content to leave to his class the application of his formulas, and if a certain number of human units had had to be cancelled out on both sides of the equation, that was only to be expected. Much of his time had been spent in the unheroic but correct function of raising money and support by touring America. When he did return to Ireland, it was all and, on one brief occasion, more than all, that the authorities could do to avoid the embarrassment of having him on their hands as a prisoner.

To such a man it would never occur to build a bridge of gold for a retreating enemy. Compromise has no place in the mathematics. If one started from the hypothesis of Ireland as an independent invariable, any failure to deduce the consequences would be demonstrably incorrect. Without the slightest arrogance, but with the maddening reasonableness of the pedagogue, Mr. de Valera continued to demonstrate the inconsistency of the slightest concession to King, Empire, or Protestants, with his main proposition. Fortunately there were other patriots who were less impracticable, notably Michael Collins, who came to the front at this crisis as the Irish counterpart of Mr. Lloyd George, a negotiator of intuitive resource and sympathetic adaptability. He was the driving force of the team of negotiators that, in spite of Mr. de Valera's unconciliatory lectures on the theme of "All or Nothing," did at last arrive in London, under the leadership of Mr. Arthur Griffith, to explore the avenues to a settlement with representatives of the British Cabinet.

Even so the President, aloof in Dublin, nearly succeeded in wrecking the whole negotiations. The Pope had sent a message of pacific congratulations to the King, who had answered in similar, apparently

harmless, strain. But he had happened to use the words "my people" in reference to Ireland, and this, to the mathematical coach, was an inaccuracy that could not pass without correction. King George was accordingly admonished that the Irish, being independent, could therefore in no sense be his people. Anything more calculated to infuriate English public opinion could not be imagined, and it was only by a tacit agreement to get on with the business and refuse to argue such irrelevancies, that a breakdown was averted.

Courage of the highest order was required in the negotiators, who, on both sides, knew that the slightest concession would be accounted against them as betrayal. The Conservative Party, which commanded a decisive Parliamentary majority, had inherited an almost fanatical hatred of Home Rule, and what was proposed now went far beyond anything that had gone by that name before the War. And the experience of the past shows that though the Conservatives may, on occasion, be led into surrender, they seldom fail to avenge it on their leaders. All the more credit redounds to Lord Birkenhead, the Lord Chancellor, who had figured in the Protestant army before the War as Galloper Smith, for throwing his decisive influence into the scale against the Die-hards of his own party. As for Mr. Lloyd George, however grievously he may have failed in the handling of this and other problems since that fatal election of 1918, he had never, even during the War, performed more signal service for his country, and mankind, than when he concentrated all his unrivalled powers of persuasion on inducing the Irish delegates to take what was, for them, the fearful responsibility of defying the tacit veto of their President and the inflamed passions of their supporters, in order that the devilish and age-long conflict of Englishman and Irishman, on Irish soil, might at long last be brought to an end. It was a small thing, in comparison, that he had sealed the fate of his own Premiership.

And let it also be admitted that if there could be any earthly atonement for the horrors that had been perpetrated under his orders, it had been made by Michael Collins when, with full consciousness of what he was about, he threw his life into the scale against their continuance. When in the small hours of the morning of December the 6th, 1921, after what amounted to an ultimatum from the English side, the Treaty was at last signed, Birkenhead remarked to him that it might be his own political death warrant. Collins, who knew enough about the leadership of gangsters to realize that this was a path on which none can turn back and live, replied, "It may be my actual death warrant."

It was.

The Treaty itself was based on a courageous effort to seek peace in the light of reality. The vital question of the Six Counties was not indeed finally settled for though they were left with their own Parliament and the option of a clean cut from the rest of Ireland, a Commission was promised with undefined powers of rectifying the boundary between the two religions. In the state of feeling prevailing in Ulster, even the most reasonable modification would probably have been resisted in arms, but in the event it proved possible, by a substantial bribe, to induce the Catholics not to press for an alteration of the *status quo*. For the rest, it was provided that the Irish Free State, as it was henceforth to be called, was, save for one or two minor concessions, to enjoy virtual independence as a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations. It could not fail to be apparent to such men as Griffith and Collins, that Ireland had, both politically and economically, everything to gain and nothing whatever to lose by association with a country that was the market for the bulk of her produce, a field of labour for her surplus population, and whose navy was capable of keeping her shores and sea communications inviolate with no expense to herself. Not the least important consideration was that if the

dream of a United Ireland was ever to become a reality, it could, in all human probability, be on no other basis than that of loyalty to the Throne and Commonwealth.

As for England, she might have been beaten, but, as the loss of France, and of Calais, and of her American Colonies, had long ago shown, she had an odd way of thriving on defeat better than on victory. She too had achieved independence. The diseased growth of a solid body of legislators at Westminster, inspired by no other motive than to plague the Pharaoh who refused to let them go, was now cut out of her system. It was odd that the Conservatives themselves did not recognize the crushing handicap of which they themselves were now relieved. But for the Irish, Lord Salisbury's Government would never have been defeated at the polls in 1892, and it is to the last degree improbable that Mr. Asquith would ever have had the power to deprive the Lords of their veto. From the Conservative point of view the relief had not come a moment too soon. A solid block of Irish Members, who would certainly have come back to Westminster the moment it suited them to do so, would have spelt defeat, instead of victory, at the polls, within less than a year from the signing of the Treaty. In 1929, and in the national crisis of 1931, the second Labour Government, by purchasing the support of the Irish, could have established itself impregably in office and power.

As for the Liberals, the friendship of the Irish had been even more disastrous to them than their enmity had been to the Conservatives. The triumph over the Lords, which they had bought by undertaking to conquer the Protestants for Mr. Redmond, was the last the Liberals were ever destined to achieve. They no longer stood for a principle; no one could ever again regard them seriously as champions of liberty. And deprived of their soul they were a mere faction, whose supporters tended to flow as naturally away to the right or to the left, as water from a ridge-top.

And this, at a time when liberty was threatened as never before, was a disaster to mankind.

The President mathematician was only affected by the action of his colleagues, as he might have been by the deliberate insertion of a wrong figure into the working out of a sum. It had never occurred to him that the process of negotiation could comprise the concession of anything to the other side. And he would have torn up the Treaty as, in former days, he must often have torn up some muddled answer to an examination question.

But this was, for the nonce, beyond even his powers. A narrow majority of the Dail Eireann had enough of sanity to refrain from wantonly plunging back the country into the horrors from which it had just emerged. The Treaty was ratified, in the teeth of Mr. de Valera's opposition. What happened in Ireland afterwards was no longer a matter of prime importance to England.

It was what might have been predicted. The logic of murder had yet to be pushed to a conclusion. Collins might have elected for the reign of peace and law, but his gunmen were still at large. In a few months' time the truly distressful island was in the throes of a civil war between the two factions of her victorious patriots. It was a war of little stand-up fighting, but of a cruelty and destructiveness that in some respects surpassed all previous records. There were even cases of rape, a crime never seriously imputed even to the Black and Tans. The Four Courts, the architectural pride of Dublin since her patriots had destroyed Gandon's Custom House in the previous year, headed the list of destruction. Historic mansions were looted and burnt by roving bands of criminals. Collins himself, true to his prediction, was betrayed into an ambush and done to death by his own gangsters. Almost at the same time the hand of death—apparently natural—removed the new President, Griffith.

And then the survivors of the *de facto* Government

showed that they had a way of dealing with murder which the sternest British commander would never have dared to adopt. A member of the new Senate having been disposed of in the usual way, they replied by shooting out of hand the four most distinguished patriots whom they had held in hitherto honourable captivity. One of them had but recently been the best man at the wedding of the Minister directly responsible. They were shortly followed by Erskine Childers, an English convert to Sinn Féin who had been reputed to be the brains of the movement. It was evident that, so long as a rebel to its authority remained in arms, the new Government was determined to make it a war of extermination. This leaden argument was finally successful in convincing the gunmen, and Ireland was at last able to settle down to the rather drab reality of her new freedom.

Mr. de Valera had escaped on this, as he had on so many other occasions. He was quite unperturbed. The working out of his sum might take a little longer than he had anticipated, but that was a minor detail. He was no longer President, but leader of an opposition, and an opposition, in a country traditionally "agin the government," is bound, in no very long time, itself to become the Government. Mr. de Valera had never made the faintest pretence of being bound by the Treaty, and when his hour struck, he would, as a matter of course, carry out his original intention of tearing it to bits.

And then one could round off the problem by solving the equation of the counties,

$$26c + 6c = 32c = 1$$

## CHAPTER X

### SAVIOURS OF INDIA

Thus England, the world victor of 1918, had proved unequal, in 1921, to holding more than a corner of her island outpost in the West. But Ireland, after all, comprised a very small portion of the world's surface or population. Far vaster were England's responsibilities as an Eastern Power, vaster than ever now that she had assumed, in addition to her Empire of India, the Protectorate of Egypt and mandates for Palestine and Mesopotamia, and was beginning to stretch out hands towards the control of Persia.

There is a myth, itself born of the East, about an island on which seafaring adventurers beach their vessel and land, but which proves to be no island at all, but a sleeping monster. There had been signs, even before the War, that the huge inert body on which the Western Powers had been marking their claims, was beginning to stir. Could it be possible that it was about to slide, with only some little churning of the surface, into the deep from which it had arisen?

That, at least, symbolizes aptly enough what had happened in Russia. The Western civilization that had been planted on her by Peter the Great, and flourished for more than two centuries, had disappeared, as it were, in a night. One angry plunge, and the waves had closed over Peter's successor and Peter's world. Half of two continents had gone back to the East, all the more ominously since the East had taken to itself the machinery and powers of the West. That it was capable of this had been shown



a dozen years before, when Japan, with ultra-Western efficiency, had dealt that Western rule, superimposed on Russia, the wound from which it had only appeared to recover. And the repercussion of that blow had been felt in every bazaar and city of the East, like the first galvanic thrill of awakening out of trance.

It was high time; for never had the fortunes of that great complex of civilizations, to which we give the name of the East, fallen so low. As late as the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the Turk had been thundering at the gates of Vienna; the Great Mogul had ruled in a splendour almost fabulous on the Peacock Throne of Hindustan; the Celestial Empire had been entering on the last of its great artistic phases; Barbary corsairs had swept the Mediterranean. But the great Industrial Revolution was at hand in the West, and the East had no hankering after the mechanical devices that the Chinese, even when they had invented them, had never troubled to develop. So the East averted its eyes from these things, and devoted itself to its own civilization.

But the West had not averted its eyes from the East. It had looked upon it as old Marshal Blücher had looked down upon London, with the ejaculation—"Was für plunder!" And the West had harnessed to its service blind and material forces with which all the civilization of the East was powerless to cope. Her ancient civilizations, her vast homelands, were partitioned out, or left as independent as the bee-keeper leaves the hive; until Japan had decided to make a virtue of necessity, and, after scrapping its own civilization, to outwesternize the West not only in mechanical efficiency, but in the cunning and covetousness of its application.

Of all the episodes of this strange story of West and East, the most remarkable and important is that of the assumption of an Indian Empire by England. The ancient civilizations of the Nile and Euphrates had passed away as utterly as the snows of yesteryear; there the Westerner could only possess himself

of ruins that their owners had long ceased to tenant. But India endured, and hardly seemed to notice, in the depths of her undying soul, the conquerors who lived in her palaces, and who were accommodating enough to perform the necessary work of government.

Never, perhaps, was there a more extraordinary conjunction than that of a mere handful of English Sahibs imposing its governance on a fifth of the Earth's total population and a civilization, still in being, of greater antiquity than their own. Physically and spiritually isolated were these little white communities, sparsely dotted in cantonments on a vast, level, ocean-like plain. Once they had left behind their barracks and bungalows, their playing fields and club gardens, the English might drive for hundreds of miles in any direction past villages, whose very names repeated themselves, *Bilharis* and *Tilharis*, *Singanamas* and *Piparias*, each with its lake and its temples, each peopled by the same laborious, patient peasantry, living on just enough to keep body and soul together in normal times. Judged by Western standards, such lives were as poor and limited as life could be; and yet there was an all-embracing religiousness, transcending the bounds of any religion, that gave them unity; there were drifts and currents in the sea of which they were the bubbles; a very little rising of the waters would suffice to obliterate the cantonment islands from the face of India, and their very memory from her dreams.

Meanwhile, there was another, very different India growing up in the towns. There the East had gone a-whoring after the strange gods of the West. There was Capitalism as crude and ruthless as it had been, in England, during the first decades of the factories and power looms. There were all the horrors of sweated and child labour, under Gradgrinds in turbans and brown-faced Bounderbys. There was a class consciousness astir very different from the old acceptance of caste. And there was that strangest of all portents, the Indian of Westernized education,

crammed full with undigested gobbets of Victorian Liberalism and perhaps even of Marxian Socialism, and asserting the claims of his native civilization at the very moment he was turning his back upon it. Give India the vote and the ballot; give her tariffs and machinery; give her Nationalism on the most approved Western model . . . it might even come to Soviets. For in the first time in India's long history it was being proclaimed that meat was more than the life, and statistics than dreams. And what Sahib would dare rise up and say nay?

The Sahibs, in fact, had nothing to say. Their spiritual isolation was almost complete. It was the way of the French to teach everyone within the confines of their empire, without distinction of colour, to regard himself as a citizen of a Republic among whose watchwords were equality and fraternity. In the cafés of Algiers, Gaul and African could mingle with as little embarrassment as in the days of Rome. But in the clubs in which the Sahibs foregathered with their womenfolk, the prime object was to reproduce a little bit of authentic England in the mist of India. Indians were not wanted, and seldom encouraged. It was a life of feverish pleasure-seeking, largely on borrowed money, dominated by womenfolk with little to do with their time except to kill it, and for perhaps half the year cut off from their husbands in hill stations, where the only relief from boredom was in the exploitation of the sex instinct, within rather expanded bounds of respectability.

The menfolk, in the meanwhile, went about their routine of service with an honest efficiency to which India owed a greater debt than she would ever be likely to acknowledge. For there is a subtle humiliation in benefits conferred without the saving grace of imaginative sympathy. And it was just that quality that the Sahibs lacked. The best of them were politely superior. Others—and they were not a few—were insolently superior. There were incidents—blackballs in clubs, rudeness in railway

carriages, cold-shouldering of colleagues—all of which, trivial in themselves, planted, in the breasts of educated Indians, an aggressive inferiority complex. Such ingratitude mattered little enough to the Sahibs, whose one ambition was to shake the dust of India off their rubber soles as frequently as possible, and, having got through their job, to be pensioned off, at India's expense, in the Elysian fastnesses of Cheltenham or Bognor Regis.

And yet there was a soul of England as well as a soul of India, that was more than the sum of its individuals. It would have seemed most natural for the Sahibs to have frankly run India as a bureaucratic despotism, with no nonsense about votes and rights. "Not what they like, but what is good for them." But this could no more be England's way in India than it could in Ireland. She might embark on it, but never with any consistency of resolution. Even before the War it had been her declared policy to fit India for representative institutions. That stern and unbending Radical, John Morley, in conjunction with the Viceroy, Lord Minto, had experimented, very tentatively, with the first beginnings. The powers conferred were so grudging, and hedged about with so many safeguards, as to have little more than a debating society value. But they were obviously only a beginning of more extensive liberties to come. And educated India, with the National Congress as its mouthpiece, was leaning more and more towards Nationalism of the Western pattern, and turning its thoughts to a completely self-governing, if not an independent India.

Then came the War, with its tremendous repercussions on the souls of all Oriental, no less than other, peoples. It is true that in India its effects were less visible on the surface than in most parts of the world. In the villages, life went on as it had for centuries, and the people were only dimly conscious that somewhere or another the Sahibs were fighting another kind of Sahibs. What is stranger still is that

life in the cantonments pursued its old, frivolous course, with only a substitution of Territorials for Regulars to mark the fact that there was a war on. Even in the hour of darkest crisis, Haig's "put your backs against the wall" aroused less interest than the preparations for next week's dance.

But India had proved an asset of the utmost value to the Allied cause. Her loyalty had, on the whole, been above praise. Her fighting peoples had freely come forward in the service, and her armies, including non-combatants, had swollen to well over a million. The last and most successful of all the Crusades, in which the Turk had been driven in confusion from the holy places of the Christian and his own too, had been accomplished largely by Indian arms. Mahomedans, in their thousands, had given their lives for the infidel against the hosts of Islam.

But there was a natural expectation that India's loyalty would not pass unrewarded. Now was the acceptable time for that advance towards self-government that had been so long adumbrated, and of which the Morley-Minto reforms were an obvious first instalment. It was not only that the educated Indian was eager to see applied to his own case those principles of Western democracy that he had been so freely taught, but that the whole of the East, from Cairo to Peking, was astir with the consciousness of returning vitality, and eager to shake off the fetters of Western domination.

That a substantial measure of constitutional advance was due to India was recognized at Westminster. Mr. Lloyd George's Secretary for India was Edwin Montagu, a young Jewish Liberal who had the courage to defy the Gilbertian tradition that the King's Minister responsible for his Indian Empire must never on any account set his foot on Indian soil. Mr. Montagu, speaking in the name of the Government, issued an impressive declaration to the effect that it was intended to develop self-governing institutions by stages, "with a view to the progressive

realization of responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire." Thus for good or ill, the honour of England was committed to a policy of fitting India to take her place, as an equal partner, in the Commonwealth of Nations.

As a first instalment, Mr. Montagu, in conjunction with Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, sponsored a scheme of Constitutional reform that became law at the end of 1919. This scheme went far beyond the Morley-Minto reforms, and was obviously meant to prepare the way for greater changes still, for as it stood it was obviously a mere temporary makeshift, combining, as it did, a central legislative Body of more dignity than real power, with responsible government in the Provinces in certain specified departments, so that a provincial ministry was a strange patchwork of officials responsible to the Governor and politicians responsible to the Assembly. As an instalment this was defensible, though the system of dyarchy, as it was called, proved even more cumbrous in practice than it had seemed on paper. As a permanency it was obviously impossible; and that, from the Indian point of view, was as it should be.

Nothing would have satisfied the extreme Nationalists, who wanted to rush India into self-government without limitation or delay. But the scheme might have secured a not unfavourable reception, on the whole, but for events that occurred before ever it passed into law, and which wrought a disastrous alteration in the whole atmosphere.

The loyalty of India had shown no sign of diminution even during the last months of the War, and, generally speaking, the country itself had remained profoundly peaceful, except for frontier troubles, and the chronic riots between Hindu and Mahomedan, who were to India what the Catholics and Protestants were to Ireland. But the authorities were well aware of sinister activities below the surface, that sometimes rose above it with murderous results. And they were

positive loss  
better experience  
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Imagine such words on the lips of a Buddha—or a Christ!

For Gandhi, who might have been a saviour, condescended to become a mere patriot, and dedicated his powers to the service of that Satanic egotism that was not for the healing but for the destruction of nations. It was the very temptation that Christ had resisted—and it was because He thought more of His Father than of His Motherland that He was crucified.

A significant story is told of the Mahatma. The Mahratta Tilak, a bitter Nationalist who, like the Mahratta hero, Sivaji, would have stuck at nothing whatever calculated to advance his cause, and yet for whom, strangely enough, Gandhi entertained the greatest reverence, once put to him one of those testing questions with which the Gospels have made us familiar:

“You love India like a son, but you also love the truth. If you had to choose between them, which would you follow?”

Christ had, without hesitation, answered a similar question in words that could be fairly transposed to “Render unto India the things that are India’s, and to God, who is Truth,<sup>1</sup> the things that are God’s.”

Not so Gandhi. He was conscious of critical scrutiny, and prudently he turned the matter over in his mind for some minutes before answering,

“In my mind India and Truth are synonymous, but if I had to make the painful choice between them, I should decide in favour of the Truth.”<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the Pleader Seer would never betray Truth, but as Truth would always be defined in terms of his brief for India, it wouldn’t much matter.

It was only after the passing of the Rowlatt Acts that Gandhi, who had done invaluable service under

<sup>1</sup> “My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth.”—Mahatma Gandhi.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Mr. G. Slocombe in his article on Gandhi in *Great Contemporaries*, p. 140.



the Red Cross in three wars, who had called for Sepoy recruits from his native Gujerat, and who had even showed a willingness to make the best of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, committed himself and Satyagraha wholly and finally to the cause of Nationalism.

The sheer force of the Mahatma's personality swept all before it. He was just such a leader as a people familiar with saints and ascetics could understand, and worship. But it was too much to expect that they would accept Satyagraha in the spirit of its apostle. Gandhi had unloosed forces that neither he, nor any other man, could control.

He proclaimed a *Hartal*, or general closing of shops on a certain day, all over India, by way of protest. The day was postponed, but, with a casualness truly Indian, the postponement was never notified at Delhi, where the mob got out of hand, and the police had to fire, causing several deaths. This was but a faint foretaste of what was to come. In several centres of population there were scenes of mob violence and repression, with its attendant casualties. In the fighting Punjab, excitement, raised to fever heat by the refusal of the authorities to allow the Mahatma to enter the Province, rose in some places to the pitch of incipient rebellion. There was no real danger of this succeeding, so long as the loyalty of the army was unaffected, since the power that held the rifles and the railways was capable of applying overwhelming force. But the situation was alarming enough for the white communities who felt themselves isolated in the midst of an actively hostile population, and who might conceivably in some outlying districts be overwhelmed before help could arrive.

What interpretation could be put on the doctrine of active love, can be judged by one terrorist proclamation, at the unprotected station of Lyallpur, which started with "Blessed be Mahatma Gandhi," and ended with the suggestion that *there were a number* of English women waiting to be raped. There was probably no real danger of such irresponsible threats

being put into practice—rape had not figured even among the horrors of the Mutiny. But one can understand that the nerves of the white people would require a very little of such stimulus to be put dangerously on edge, and one must take this into account if one is to understand the frightful tragedy in which this first experiment in Soul-force was to culminate, a tragedy that was to cast a deathly shadow over all future prospects of co-operation between Indian and Englishman.

The worst centre of disturbance in the Punjab had been the city of Amritsar, famous for its Golden Temple of the Sikh cult. It may be that its comparative accessibility from the Afghan frontier, beyond which war was already brewing, may have accounted for the presence in it of an unusual number of tough characters, but however this may be, both the city and surrounding country were, for a short time, at the mercy of mobs who perpetrated a number of brutal outrages, including the sacking of a bank and the murder of its white managers. By the time Brigadier-General Dyer arrived to take charge of the situation, at the head of a small but sufficient force of troops, the English residents had been collected safely out of harm's way, but the city still belonged to the mob.

The General, a fighting soldier of proved competence, at once proceeded to take charge of the situation. He marched through the city proclaiming, by poster and beat of drum, that he would permit no meetings of more than four persons. He was unopposed. But next day he learned that in spite of his warning, a crowd had gathered to listen to some speeches—doubtless of an inflammatory nature—on a bare expanse of ground enclosed by walls that passed by the name of garden. This provocation seems to have aroused in Dyer what can only be described as a brain-storm. It was his obvious duty to disperse the mob, with whatever force might be necessary, and, if possible, to arrest its leaders. Dyer had been a lecturer on military law, and must have known that

Indian Army Orders only allowed firing on crowds in the very last resort—such fire to be strictly controlled with a view to ceasing it at the earliest possible moment. But he was no longer looking at the matter as a mere soldier. He had come to the conclusion that nothing would serve but to teach a lesson that should resound through the length and breadth of the Punjab, and create such a terror of British vengeance as should nip the revolutionary threat in the bud. He no doubt, like Gandhi, saw himself in the light of a saviour. Mr. Kipling has demonstrated, in one of his stories, how the British Tommy is as capable, on occasion, as any schoolgirl, of giving way to hysteria. The case of General Dyer would suggest that this may hold good, also, for the higher ranks.

He started off, hot foot, for the Garden, with a force that amounted after dropping pickets on the way to an armoured car and 75 sepoy.<sup>1</sup> By a merciful Providence, he was unable to get the car up to the entrance, as he had fully intended to use its machine gun, but the remainder of his force he ordered, without warning or hesitation, to pour magazine fire into the thick of the densely-packed crowd. What followed is too ghastly to imagine. The walled enclosure was a death-trap, and as the terrified wretches rushed hither and thither in their efforts to escape, the General ordered fire to be concentrated on wherever they bunched or huddled together. Some, it is said, as if the furies of Cawnpore were brooding over the scene, perished by leaping down a well. It was suggested afterwards that Dyer mistook the panic-stricken rushes of his victims for a design to overwhelm his force with their staves, but this would not account for his having prolonged the massacre for ten mortal minutes, and only having left off when his ammunition was beginning to fail. By that time the ground was strewn with at least 1,500 dead and wounded men. Dyer made not the slightest effort to attend to, or provide for, the wounded—it was not, he held, his job—but marched

<sup>1</sup> The actual rifle strength was 50.

back to quarters, presumably well content with his work. What state of mind he was in is shown by the famous crawling order he issued, compelling all Indians to crawl on their hands and knees past the spot at which a woman missionary had been brutally set on by some roughs.

There is at least this much to be said for Dyer, that he had shed enough blood to quench the last embers of rebellion in the Punjab. For the moment, scarcely a mouse dared stir. But the effects of bloodshed are not limited to the moment. If India had learnt a lesson, it was not that which either Gandhi or Dyer had intended to teach. The Mahatma, who was noble enough to be as candid with the world as he could be with his own soul, was horrified with the result of launching Satyagraha on an India unprepared to receive it, and hastened to call off his campaign—not for the last time.

But no preaching of his could have had half the effect, in stirring up Nationalist feeling, of Dyer's leaden Sermon in the Garden. Britain might come to India with her hands outstretched in friendship, but to Indian eyes there was blood on them, that all the waters of the Five Rivers would not wash away. The present author was the recipient, not long after these events, of a heart-broken letter from a Brahmin Pundit, a devoted loyalist, living in the Holy City of Muttra. "When you were here"—such was the effect of his words—"and went in uniform into the city, you would be received everywhere with friendly greetings, but now you would get nothing but cold silence, or else hear, shouted behind you, *Bande Materam!* or *Gandhi Mahavi ki jai!*" Some bond of sympathy had, in fact, been snapped between the two races, and it would be a long time before it could be rejoined.

The British authorities did, indeed, what they could to undo the mischief. The news was slow in trickling through, but as soon as it was fully realized what had happened at Amritsar, a Commission, including Indian members, was appointed to investigate the tragedy,

and after General Dyer had been submitted to a ruthless cross-examination, out of which he came very badly, he was declared unfit for further service in India—a decision necessary in his own interests, as the danger to his life would have been great, but involving the end of his active career as a soldier. Considering no more than the gross breach of discipline involved in his taking the law, as he did, into his own hands, and in his manifest failure to keep his head in a crisis, he must be admitted to have got off lightly—though it would have been difficult to have borne more heavily one who had at least acted in good faith as the saviour of his countrymen.

The King's Uncle, the Duke of Connaught, when he came to India to initiate the reformed Constitution, spoke words of earnest reconciliation, and, though in a more restrained key than Gandhi's, of regret. He even performed the unmistakably symbolic action of visiting the fatal garden. But anything that the chivalrous and popular old soldier might have done, had been undone in advance by the spontaneous rally of practically the whole Anglo-Indian community, and the most reactionary section of the English upper class, to the defence—and almost the apotheosis—of Dyer.

He was treated as a martyr, a hero, the man who had saved Englishmen from murder, Englishwomen from rape, and the Empire from destruction. When he left his command, under a cloud, the white community gave him a vociferously exuberant send off, and the effect of this performance in India was not very different from what would, in England, be the result of unveiling a memorial, at Cawnpore, to Nana Sahib. The House of Lords went out of its way to give the Commons, and Mr. Montagu, a slap in the face, by formally vindicating General Dyer's action. And the chief newspaper organ of the extreme Right got up a subscription on his behalf, that proved not only sufficient to purchase him a sword of honour, but also to provide him with a tip large enough to compensate him for any material loss that might have

ensued from his relegation to half-pay. By what sort of feeling some, at least, of the subscribers, were swayed, may be judged from the quotation chosen by one of them in lieu of a signature. "A dog of the House of Montagu moves me." The Montagu's were, of course, Jews.

It was human and English to rally to the support of an all too simple soldier believed to be the victim of politicians. But it was tragically ill-advised.

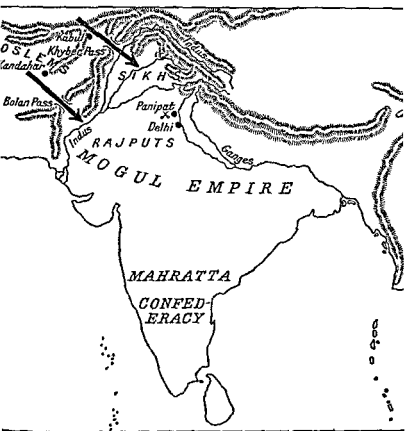
## CHAPTER XI

### INDIAN-PACIFIC

The dominating factor of the Indian problem was not to be found in India nor yet in England. However much India might have developed politically, she had undergone an even more fundamental change in her geography. For the geography of human communities is governed, like so many other sciences, by the principle of relativity.

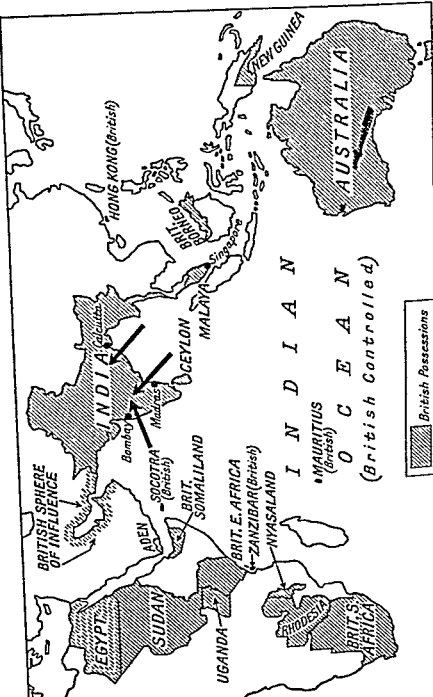
She was undergoing a change not altogether dissimilar from that of Egypt more than two thousand years previously. The Egypt of the Pharaohs had been a long strip of river valley, almost completely shielded from danger by her surrounding desert, and only approached from the sea by a few trading vessels. But with the rise of Greece, and still more, of Rome, she came to be no longer primarily the Kingdom of the Nile Valley, but one of several bordering the Mediterranean, and perhaps inevitably, in course of time, a province in a Mediterranean Empire.

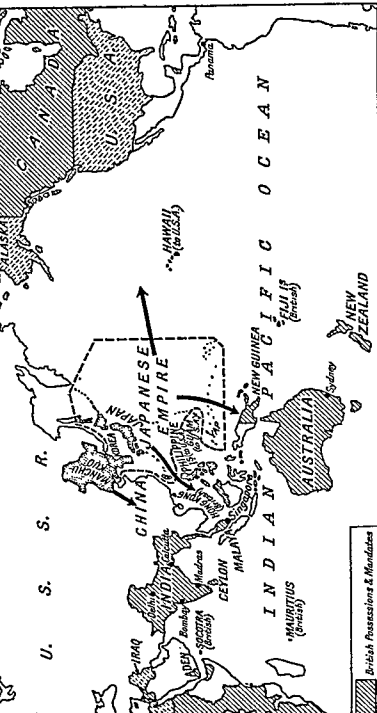
Substitute India for Egypt and the Indian Ocean for the Mediterranean, and we shall be better placed to understand the change in India's geographical orientation brought about by the opening of sea communications with Europe. England was never able to dominate the shores of that ocean as Rome had those of her own inland sea, but she succeeded to a surprising extent in occupying all the key positions, and enough of its shores to establish a supremacy over its waters beyond the challenge of any European Power. The effect of her penetration was to seal the passes through which had poured successive



1. INDIA A LAND POWER, PRE-BRITISH.







3. THE INDIAN-PACIFIC STATES, 20TH CENTURY (PRESENT TIME).

place, with admirable promptitude, among the Powers of the anti-German crusade—and had, while functioning as the perfect ally, taken advantage of their pre-occupation to impose demands on China that would have reduced her to the status of a Protectorate, a monopoly for neighbourly exploitation. This was a little too much for China's European exploiters, and a great deal too much for the United States, to swallow. It was evident, even to Japan herself, that she had bitten off more than she could chew. China was too big a morsel to be more than nibbled at just at present. Her time would come. But meanwhile the War had allowed Japan to seize Germany's share of the Pacific islands right down to the Equator, thus planting herself on America's communications with the Philippines, and bringing Japanese expansion, at a bound, two-thirds of the way to the Australian Continent.

In America, at any rate, it had become fully obvious after the War that if she had to fight again, it was less likely to be on the Rhine than for the mastery of the Pacific. In conversation, in the Press, in the books about imaginary wars that are so often a prelude to real ones, Japan, and not Germany, figured as the enemy. A regular scare was raised about the defenceless state of the Western seaboard. And the peaceful penetration of that seaboard by Japanese immigration, long a grievance and source of friction, underwent such restriction as to be practically cut off.

England was all this time linked in bonds of alliance with Japan, who, for her part, had carried out her obligations with scrupulous correctness. This alliance had been constantly acclaimed as a triumph of statecraft. That Japan could ever be dangerous to Australia or India had never crossed the consciousness of the Englishman in the street. And yet, to those extremely competent specialists who are the real framers of British foreign policy, it must have become obvious that Britain would have to stop supporting Japan if the Commonwealth of Nations was to hold

together. Canada had too many ties with the United States not to be affected by a sense of common danger. And Australia realized, only too well, what a part her territory played in Japanese ambitions.

For the driving impulse of Japanese expansion was given less by her soldiers, than by her women. They continued to propagate at the tempo of the old civilization, but without the check provided by its high rate of infant mortality. Every year the islands, crowded already, were crowded still further by another half-million or so of new inhabitants, with bellies to fill, and hands to be employed. An effective system of birth control was the one reform that the lords of the new régime neither could, nor would, bring to pass. Accordingly Japan's urge to expand was no idle ambition, but a vital necessity. She was fleeing from the spectre she herself had raised, of a workless and foodless populace turning in desperation on its rulers. But whither should she flee? America was closing her doors. Australia, with vast expanses of territory that her own inhabitants could not cultivate, refused to open hers. Her land, even if it lay idle, was to constitute a white man's preserve. It was her sovereign right to play dog in the manger if she chose. But would the Japanese see it quite in this light? It was impossible for Post-war Australia to have quite the old nineteenth-century feeling of being out of harm's way at the world's end. A yellow face had begun to haunt her nightmares.

Australia's limited resources were incapable of coping with Japanese numbers and Japanese sea power, and left to herself she would have nothing to rely on but the forbearance of a yellow Ahab towards a white Naboth. Some power, greater than herself, had got to keep the white man's peace in the Pacific. If the Mother Country was capable of performing this office, so much the better. But if not, the head office of the Pacific-Anglo-Saxon Mutual Guarantee Society might be transferred from London to Washington.

It was under these circumstances that the United

States' Government, which had ostentatiously held aloof from European affairs, essayed, by a dramatic stroke of policy, to ease the steadily increasing tension in the Pacific. It summoned a conference of the principal naval powers to Washington for the primary purpose of discussing naval disarmament.

One of the paradoxical results of the War, in which England had seen the fleet of her great European rival surrendered and scuttled at Scapa Flow, had been to end her long claim to the possession of an unchallengeable sea-power. She was no longer able to build more than ship for ship against the United States, especially now that her tributary obligations compelled her to foot a substantial part of the American construction bill. What was even more startling was the complacency with which this state of things was accepted by a nation that had been ready to meet the German challenge with the last man and the last guinea. The fact is that John Bull refused to envisage the prospect of fighting Uncle Sam under any circumstances whatever, or to listen to the alarmists who endeavoured to convince him of such a possibility. There were limits even to the madness of nations.

It was thus that the American Secretary of State, Mr. Hughes, was able to confront the Conference, when it met in November 1921, with one of the most startling and statesmanlike proposals in diplomatic history. Throwing all his cards on the table, he boldly proposed a complete holiday in naval construction for at least ten years. Owing to the War, the five principal powers grouped round the table, England, the United States, Japan, France and Italy, were the only ones whose navies seriously counted, or were likely to do so, for a clear decade. Why not fix their relative strengths by mutual agreement, level down to that proportion by breaking up ships, and let each nation keep its money in its purse instead of squandering it on what, for any useful purpose, was no better than floating scrap iron? The vital

ratio of the three Pacific rivals would be naval equality for the two Anglo-Saxon Powers, with a 60 per cent ratio of the Japanese navy to either of theirs.

This was too sane and sensible a proposal to be accepted without the whittling and haggling inseparable from the operations of international anarchy, but enough of it survived to make the Conference the most hopeful event that had happened since the War, or that was to happen for many years to come. As far as big ships were concerned, the matter was settled by raising Japan's ratio to 70, and conceding a rather childish point she raised stipulating for the completion of a certain battleship for which a public subscription had been raised, and which had therefore a sentimental value. This involved a lot of extra expense and construction all round in order to maintain the ratio, and did nobody, except armament firms and dockyard hands, any good whatever.

It was only in respect of the smaller craft, the submarines and their surface chasers, that the Conference broke down altogether. This was owing to the blank refusal of France to part with a weapon that her statesmen had the nerve to describe as being purely defensive. A war between partners in an Entente-Cordiale might not be envisaged or desired, but, in the intercourse of civilized nations, business must precede sentiment, and a submarine blockade, however shocking it had been when perpetrated by U-Boats, might be viewed in a very different light when sanctified by the interests of France. So it was agreed that the preparation for this most diabolical of all forms of sea warfare should be regulated by no other law than that of anarchy and the survival of the fittest.

But the limitation of navies was not the only, nor perhaps the most important, result of the Washington Conference. A necessary part of such an agreement must be a stabilization of affairs in the Pacific. Would Japan consent to put limits to the aggressive Imperialism that was already felt as a challenge by the

United States, and whose menace to the British Commonwealth of Nations was just beginning to be suspected? And, in particular, would she consent to keep her hands off her neighbour China?

Japan proved blandly complaisant. If her morality was Prussian, there was nothing of the crude brutality of Prussia about her methods. In her diplomacy, as in her wrestling, she knew the art of conquering by yielding to pressure. A recent military excursion into Eastern Siberia, where she had squandered men and money in the wake of a tumbledown White Government, had convinced her that it was time to cut her losses and gather strength for the next advance. China, slipping deeper and deeper into anarchy, could be trusted to drop into her hands, province by province, in due season. The ripeness was all.

Accordingly Japan, making a favour of necessity, acted with the sweetest reasonableness. She would join the other Powers in respecting China's integrity and independence, and in maintaining the open door for trade. She would even consent to renounce the reversion from Germany of the Shantung Province. She abjured all covetousness of Russian Territory. And, with the most understanding courtesy, she allowed England to terminate the alliance and substitute for it a Four Power Pact, in which they were joined by the United States and France, the object being to ensure the peace of the Pacific by the friendly co-operation of all those capable of breaking it.

It seemed an unexceptionable, almost an idyllic arrangement. But a close perusal of the terms might have detected one highly significant clause. This was an undertaking by Britain, in return for similar concessions by her co-signatories, not to construct fortifications *East of 110° Longitude*. This figure had been deliberately chosen so as to leave out the port and harbour of Singapore, which had now come to possess a strategical importance which put even that of Gibraltar into the shade. It stood on the flank of any possible Japanese move against Australia. More-

over, commanding, as it did, the most obvious entrance into the Indian Ocean from the Pacific, it stood in the path, or on the flank, of any Japanese move against India—or even the Cape.

No sooner was the alliance dissolved and the pact signed, than Britain, with a patient deliberation not unworthy of her real, though unacknowledged adversary, and with assistance from Australia, set herself to the task of gradually converting Singapore into the most scientifically impregnable of the world's fortresses. Whether this policy was strategically sound, or whether it was calculated to create such a death-trap as Port Arthur had proved for the Russians, was open to question. As to its object, there could be no question whatever. It was the reply of the British Commonwealth to the menace of Japanese Imperialism in the Indian-Pacific Ocean. It was an act of potential war.

A new vista had opened, of the four daughter Nations of the British Commonwealth, along with the Empire of India, and the United States of America, bordering the same immense, but unitary, expanse of water, and becoming gradually conscious, or sub-conscious, of a common danger drawing together a common civilization. Even if that danger should never materialize, the mere sense of it might have a decisive historical importance.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS

It was not until 1923 that a distinction was acknowledged in Constitutional theory that had long existed in practice, by the appointment of a separate Secretary of State to deal with the relations of the Home Country to the Daughter Nations, or Dominions, and the retention of the Colonial Secretary to deal with all that was left of the British possessions, exclusive of India,<sup>1</sup> overseas. The British Commonwealth of Nations had come of age, and all that was left of a British Empire was a rump of Territories that were too small or too backward for the assumption of full nationhood.

It is time to explain what, in the Post-war era, is the significance of this term, *British Commonwealth of Nations*, and why it is used here in preference to the shorter, and more picturesque term, *Empire*. The reason can be summed up in a sentence—there can be no abiding British Empire, because inasmuch as it remains an Empire it fails to be British.

One hears a great deal about the vulgar arrogance that is the mark of an unenlightened patriotism. But there is also such a thing as a vulgar modesty, a tendency to decry the chief glory of one's own people, because it is not recognized as glorious.

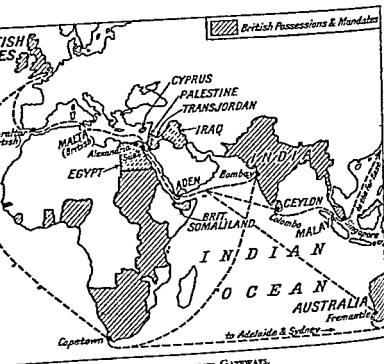
He is a poor patriot who talks of Britain as the mistress of a mere empire, like those of Assyria, or Persia, or Spain, and he strangely underrates her real greatness who even speaks of her as a modern imitator

<sup>1</sup> India's partnership in the Commonwealth was at last formally recognized by her admission to the Imperial Conference and the League of Nations.

of Rome. It is nothing wonderful that her sons should sway realms that Cæsar never knew, but it is uniquely glorious that they should put into practice ideas of which no Cæsar ever dreamed, and that they should give birth to a form of human association that is as definitely in advance of Empire as Man is in advance of the ape, one whose guiding principle is not force, but freedom.

It was not to be expected that such a conception should be born perfect and fully armed at all points like Athene from the head of Zeus. The genius of a people gropes but blindly and gradually into consciousness, through centuries of trial and error. It was only natural for England to go whoring after the familiar gods of her neighbours; to try the good, old principle of rule by force and conquest, as she did, to her sorrow and discomfiture, in Ireland and America; to talk, in the very dawn of the twentieth century, of the Law, the Blood, and the White Man's Burden, like some weedy Fascist trying to pass for an ancient Roman. But all the while the genius of her people was finding out its own way, a surer and a wiser way than that pointed to by signboards decorated with the smartest red, white and blue.

Indeed, this Empire, or whatever it was, was remarkable chiefly for disappointing the expectations and dashing the hopes of all the most ardent Imperialists. As an Empire, it never succeeded in coming up to the most rudimentary expectations. It never was, but always to be, united in the bonds of a working constitution, even of the loosest federal kind. Its component Dominions seemed to take a positive delight in snipping even those few formal ties that were still left. Those who judged by formal and precise standards had remarked, even before the War, that this partnership lacked the binding force of such *pacts as the Dual and the Triple Alliance*. In Germany it had been confidently believed that the first shot fired in a European war would be the signal for the dissolution of the Empire.



4. THE COMMONWEALTH GATEWAYS.

The very reverse had been the case. From every Dominion, from every colony, contingents had hastened to take their place as units of the British Army, of which, in the closing stages, the Canadian and Australian might have been described as the fighting spear-heads. And during the War the co-operation between the Dominions and Mother Country became extraordinarily close, Dominion representatives being admitted to the Imperial War Cabinet.

When the Peace Terms came to be discussed, the Dominions and India appeared at the council table with the status of full-grown nations, claiming the proud privilege of affixing their seals and signatures along with those of the other High Contracting Powers. It was an unprecedented status, this of nations appearing at one and the same time as sovereign in their own right, and as members of a super-national unit, and it was easy for lawyers to suggest all kinds of awkward situations to which it might, at least in theory, give rise. Foreign observers, and even those Englishmen who took words at their face value, were more than ever at a loss to fathom the meaning of this new, and seemingly quite illogical phenomenon of an *Empire that carefully avoided being anything that empires had ever been in the past or were supposed to be now.*

What was it that had brought these men to die on all the battlefields from Flanders to Jericho? What was it that had induced men like Smuts and Botha, lately the doughtiest opponents of Britain in arms, to turn against their own hero comrade, de Wet, when he had sought to renew the old struggle? It is as Carlyle divined, that "there is a sympathy in muskets, in heaped masses of men: nay, are not Mankind, in whole, like tuned strings, and a cunning, infinite concordance and unity; you smite one string, *and all strings will begin sounding. . . .*" Yes, but to what chord had the whole British Commonwealth thus spontaneously vibrated?

Not assuredly to one of abstract enthusiasm for

Empire. The slightest attempt to assert an *imperium* over any Dominion would almost certainly have had the effect of dissolving the partnership. It would be more to the point if we looked for an explanation in an instinctive hostility to the whole Imperial principle. In Germany this principle had been asserted in its most uncompromising form. Her triumph would, so the Dominions felt, have meant the end of that jealously-asserted freedom that was the very soul of the British Commonwealth of Nations. It would have meant another Rome imposing order and discipline, standardizing the world to her chosen pattern. And if the very idea of dictation from the Mother Country was enough to arouse all the most hostile passions in the colonial nature, dictation from Potsdam would have been infinitely less congenial. If the Dominion forces had been constrained to adopt a motto, none better could have been chosen than, "We must be free or die."

It was in their very blood; it was rooted centuries deep in their past, at least, in so far as that blood and past were English. They had—what was perhaps most important of all—assimilated the tradition of the English Common Law, with its stubborn assertion of individual rights and liberties, in contrast with the ordered uniformity that was aimed at by the law of the Cæsars, the law that in one form or another reigned supreme among the nations of Continental Europe.

But just the very reason that had made the Dominions come into the War, made them equally unwilling to come into any sort of formally organized empire. Disraeli may have dreamed of combining *imperium* with *libertas*, but with the Dominions, *libertas* was the Ormuz, the soul of light and goodness, and *imperium* the Ahriman, the Dark Power that wars against the light. But the *libertas* dear to the Anglo-Saxons was by no means the abstract liberty of the French Revolution. The habit of mind engendered by the Common Law did not concern itself with

liberty in general, but with liberties in particular. The free man was not going to be put upon for the sake of an idea—rights came before reasons, even of state. And it was the same with the free Dominions. Every reason in the world might be urged for regulating their intercourse by the machinery of a formal constitution; every sort of disadvantage and absurdity could be proved to result from the apparent anarchy of their present relationship. But the Colonials did not care. They meant to keep their liberties; to acquire any others that might be left to attain, and to assert them on all occasions as loudly as possible—for they were an assertive folk. And when shocked Imperialists pointed out that an empire of this kind was no empire at all, they were speaking the perfect truth. But this partnership might conceivably prove itself to be something stronger and more enduring than any empire.

There were high hopes, in the Mother Country, that some form of Imperial Federation was going to emerge from the Imperial Conference, that was summoned in 1921, and preceded the Washington Conference. There had been some idea of following it up in the next year by another Conference for the purpose of drafting an Imperial Constitution. But it soon became evident that this second Conference might be postponed to the Greek Calends, because there was not going to be any Constitution. Even that purely consultative body, the Imperial War Cabinet, was more than the Dominions were prepared to tolerate in time of peace.

There was one member of the partnership, and one only, whose freedom was decidedly, and even narrowly, restricted by the fact of her membership. That member was Britain herself. Mr. Lloyd George pointed out, with whimsical intuition, at the opening meeting, that it was no longer a question of Downing Street taking charge of the Empire, but of the Empire taking charge of Downing Street. For in the eyes of the world, Britain was the senior partner, and in

matters of policy, if the Commonwealth of Nations was to speak with one voice, the voice must be that of Britain. But as the individual Dominions were perfectly determined not to be led or driven into any policy of which they disapproved, this put on Britain a task of extraordinary delicacy. For she had to refrain from any act or gesture that each and all of her Dominions, who were in any way concerned, would not be prepared to endorse. Her problem was like that of a man who tries to propel a number of cubes, laid on end, across a smooth table, by pushing the hindmost. So long as he continues to push quite straight in a line passing through all their centres, the cubes will go forward, and push through any opposition like a battering ram. But once let him deviate to right or left, and he parts company with all the cubes except his own—their unity is at an end.

Thus it would be true to say that the Commonwealth of Nations only held together on condition that there should be no such thing as a British Empire—as far, at any rate as the Dominions were concerned. The least attempt to turn the partnership into an imperial unit, on the model of other empires or expanded nationalities, would have meant the secession of all the Dominions in a body. And this Conference of 1921 showed that they were determined to keep a jealous watch on the senior partner's foreign policy. Nothing would induce them to back any aggression, or be involved in any martial entanglement. As General Smuts, the philosopher statesman who, in spite of his having been an opponent of England in the field, had become a veritable apostle of the Commonwealth ideal, put it to the Conference: Armaments depend on policy, and therefore policy should not be such as to necessitate big armaments. The only path of safety, he went on to add, was one in which the Empire could work in concert with the United States.

This meant that the time had come for dropping

that alliance with Japan which—whatever its merits as a piece of Machiavellian statecraft—could not fail to be a cause of enstrangement between the two great Anglo-Saxon Powers. Mr. Meighen, the Canadian Premier, drove the point home when he opposed the renewal of the alliance on the ground that Canada could not be party to any contract that might involve her in conflict with the United States, and went on to enunciate the doctrine that Britain should enter into no treaties or alliances without previously consulting the Dominions, and, in particular, accepting Canada's advice as final in all decisions concerning her relations with the States. We have seen how, later in the year, Britain obediently retired from her Japanese partnership.

The succeeding years of the decade witnessed the strange spectacle of its component parts asserting an ever more complete and unqualified independence of what was still called the Empire, and that of Britain, ruled nearly all the time by professedly Imperialist governments, cheerfully divesting herself of the last vestiges of her *imperium*. To unfriendly eyes the spectacle might have resembled that of a foolishly good-natured mother, being ordered about by a family of ultra-modern daughters, completely out of her control. And yet those who knew the family intimately might have realized that the ties of affection had only strengthened as those of discipline had relaxed. There was an excellent understanding between members of that family, whatever old-fashioned gossips might choose to say about it.



## CHAPTER XIII

### SCRAPPING RECONSTRUCTION

When, on the 15th of February, 1921, the King came to open a new Session of Parliament, Mr. Lloyd George's Coalition was entering on its third working year of office. But already circumstances had changed so utterly as to make the hectic election, of which it had been the product, recede into a past almost incredibly remote. Where now were the carrots dangled before the electorate? Where now the homes fit for heroes and indemnities fit for victors? The Allies were still whistling—or rather storming and gesticulating with side-glances of extreme disfavour at each other—for their money. The Kaiser had not even been tried, let alone hung. And as for the heroes, to the shortage of homes had been added an even more serious shortage of jobs.

Moreover, Mr. Lloyd George and his team of Ministers found themselves committed to a policy the exact opposite of that to which they had originally pledged themselves. It was no longer a question of winning the Peace as the War had been won, by comprehensive measures of national planning. The nation's expenditure had soared to such colossal figures, and taxation was so crushing, that the consuming anxiety, on the Government benches, was to lighten, by almost any means, a burden that was fast becoming too great to be borne. The danger was, in fact, of a panic flight from excessive planning and State control, to a planlessness amounting to administrative anarchy. It was difficult to preserve a nice balance when the stunt press was bawling "squander-

mania" to the full extent of its lungs, and when, on the other side, the Labour Opposition was ostentatiously indifferent to any considerations of economy whatever, except in the fighting services.

The position of Mr. Lloyd George was becoming more and more anomalous. He was at the mercy of the solid Conservative majority behind him, who were determined to reverse and abjure everything with which his name was associated. It was his genius to be perpetually advancing, dazzling his supporters and confounding his opponents by the brilliance of his improvisations. What his supporters in Parliament wanted—and with them, probably a great majority of their countrymen—was a quiet and reasonably prosperous existence, without the perpetual thrills and emotional tensions of the last few years. In England, as in America, the cry was all for normalcy. And both the virtues and the weaknesses of Mr. Lloyd George disqualified him from any plausible *championship of normalcy*.

Still, there he was, at the wheel of the ship of State and with a prestige exceeding that of any rival skipper. One of two things had to be done, either to leave the bridge, or to set the engines full speed astern. The former would no doubt have been the more dignified, and more prudent course. But Mr. Lloyd George would have had to change his nature for it to become even thinkable. His career had been a series of improvisations, and his capacity of adapting himself to a situation had never yet failed him. He would adapt himself to this one, at whatever expense of consistency.

Accordingly we find the Coalition Government reversing its original policy, and entering on one of hurried decontrol. Already the great war time motor depot at Slough, whose retention in time of peace had been the bugbear of the economy advocates, had been sold off for what it would fetch. And now, in 1921, the State started to divest itself of its responsibilities with as much eagerness as it had assumed them. The

Housing Act, that was to have provided the homes for heroes, was to all interests and purposes scrapped, a fact that led to the resignation from the Health Ministry of its author, Dr. Addison. The minimum wage guaranteed to agricultural labourers was likewise abandoned. The Railways were amalgamated by Sir Eric Geddes into four great companies and left to work out their own destinies.

But the most momentous of all these measures of decontrol, was that of the mining industry. Here an extremely important point of principle was involved. The slump had hit the mines harder than any other branch of industry. The export trade had more than slumped—it had collapsed. All the gains won by the miners in that ill-timed strike in the Autumn had vanished into thin air. And now, as long as control lasted, wages and profits were being kept from falling still further by the simple process of the State putting its hand into the pockets of the taxpayer, and passing on the takings—several millions every month—to the industry.

We have seen how the State had already decided that it could, and must, saddle itself with the burden of providing, somehow, for its unemployed, though this, when the unemployed were numbered by the million, was straining its resources to the limit. But it was quite another matter to make a free gift to the employed of wages, or to the employers of profits, that they were unable to earn, and to give every industry the right to fasten itself like a leech upon the body of the community. For it was obvious that if such a right were conceded to one, it could not be refused to all.

Accordingly the Government intimated to the owners and miners that this (to them) highly desirable state of things must cease, at three weeks notice, on April 1, instead of in August, as originally intended, and left it to them to lay their heads together and come to some arrangement for the apportioning among themselves of such diminishing takings as

the industry was still able to yield. It was obvious that this must involve painful sacrifices for both parties. But the proverbial cat and dog were more likely to agree than these most obstinate and uncompromising of all combatants in the war of Capital against Labour. The miners were for a national settlement and a pool of profits, the owners for a settlement by districts. And as neither would budge an inch, the coming of decontrol was signaled by a strike of the whole industry.

It was a strike of a recklessness unprecedented. Hitherto there had always been an honourable, or sensible, understanding, that whatever else might be the differences of Capital and Labour, the safety of the mines, on which both depended, was sacrosanct. But now even the safety men, by whose exertions the mines were kept from being flooded, were called out with the rest, in spite of the irreparable mischief that this step would involve.

But this was not the only mischief. The strike could not, in fact, have been timed at a more unfortunate moment for the nation, the Government, or the miners themselves. The slump still held industry in its grip, but there had been faint indications that the worst might be past. Now, however, what was literally the driving force of industry was cut off. In all the industrial districts hands were being turned away, and it was doubtful, whether even the end of the strike would see them taken on again. The unemployment figures, exclusive of the strikers themselves, soared up above the two million mark, a thing that even a year before no one would have believed to be within the bounds of possibility.

The Government, now thoroughly alarmed, faced the situation as if it were one of war. Volunteers were called for to save the mines from flooding; reservists were called to the colours; a special defence force was recruited of no less than 70,000 men, the number of the British Expeditionary Force that had taken the field in 1914. It was easy enough to raise

them among the unemployed, many of them war veterans, who were only too glad to get a cushy job and good rations under canvas, though whether they would have been a reliable force in any serious civil disturbances is something more than doubtful. But there was no civil disturbance, to speak of. The strike was law-abiding to an extent that would have been inconceivable anywhere else in the world, in an industrial struggle of such bitterness.

It was a fortnight after the miners had come out that the decisive event occurred that decided the issue. As industrial tactics, a strike in the middle of a slump would have been sheer suicide, but for the fact that the miners were convinced that they would not fight alone. The great Triple Alliance was at last to be put to the proof. If the railwaymen and the transport workers were to come out in support of the miners, the whole economic life of the community would be brought to a standstill, and the community itself held to ransom. There was no mistake about it. The Government had undertaken to grant a temporary subsidy to wages in the poorest areas, but this was not considered enough. The leaders of the other two Unions had undertaken to call out their men on the evening of April 12th, and this date was postponed till ten o'clock on the evening of the 15th, when the long-threatened hold-up was—it seemed irrevocably—decided on.

Frantic last minute efforts to avert this catastrophe were being made. Members of Parliament constituted themselves formal mediators, and succeeded in obtaining from Mr. Frank Hodges, the Secretary of the Miners' Federation, an offer for a temporary settlement of the wages question that would have at least allowed scope for further negotiations. This was joyful news not only for the community at large, but for the leaders of the other two Unions, who, in spite of their brave words, were anything but eager to burn their own fingers in order to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the miners, and who had a

shrewd suspicion that the whole affair would end in a ghastly, and expensive, fiasco. But Mr. Hodges had spoken without his book. His own executive repudiated him. Its members knew only too well the strength of the fighting spirit behind them, and they did not dare to recede an inch from their original demands. But the heads of the other two Unions were by no means prepared to repudiate Mr. Hodges, or to be dragged in the wake of the extremists in the Miners' Federation. They eagerly accepted the excuse offered of retiring gracefully from the contest, and orders were wired to their various branches to carry on as usual. The Triple Alliance had been put to the test, and failed to function.

The ordinary man heaved his customary sigh of relief, but among the militant Left Wing of the Labour Movement fury and consternation were unbounded. That day, April 15th, was christened Black Friday. Every term of abuse was heaped on the leaders who were supposed to have betrayed the cause, and particularly on Mr. J. H. Thomas, who, from this time forth, became more hated in extremist circles than any Capitalist millionaire. The Triple Alliance was indeed shattered, but the idea of a general strike survived, and from this time forward it became the dream of every class warrior to do on some future occasion what ought to have been done on this. Nay more, it became almost a certainty that if, on the occasion of some future industrial contest, the team spirit of Labour was strongly roused, nothing could prevent its whole forces from being stampeded into the fray, least of all its notoriously timid leaders who would not dare risk being associated with another Black Friday.

With the withdrawal of the other two Unions, all chance of success had gone out of the strike, and it merely remained to drag out the weary contest until some face-saving compromise could be achieved, and some ransom extracted from the community. At the end of May the Government came down with an

offer of £10,000,000 to ease the transition to a reduced scale of wages, but though by this time it was evident that there was not the least prospect of success for the strike, the offer was rejected by an overwhelming majority of the men. But the only anxiety of the Executive, with its funds depleted, was to get them back to work on any terms that could be obtained, and by the end of June another settlement had been patched up, which enabled the mines to be restarted on July 4th, without any further ballot of the rank and file.

But the cost to the nation was enormous. To quote the figures given in the annual Register, there was the subsidy of 10 millions, another 10 for indemnification of railway profits, and not far short of 9 for the various Defence Forces and civil emergency organizations. The cost of the whole stoppage was estimated at no less than 250 millions, and it produced an increase in the Floating Debt of over 98½ millions.<sup>1</sup>

This was hardly calculated to ease the troubles of a Government that was now desperately alive to the necessity for cutting down expenses. But it lent an even greater impetus to the anti-waste propaganda that had now captured the Conservative majority, to the practically complete exclusion of the enthusiasm for construction and planning to which Mr. Lloyd George had appealed at the election, and with which his name was still associated.

His position was more than ever lonely now, since in March, Mr. Bonar Law, who had modestly stood aside from the Premiership in 1916 to make way for him, was compelled to retire from the Government by the first advances of the illness that was to end with his death. Bonar Law's great influence in the Conservative Party, and his self-effacing loyalty, had rendered his support as valuable as that of Mr. Stanley Baldwin was to prove to another Coalition Premier, in circumstances curiously similar.

It goes without saying that the relentless vendetta

<sup>1</sup> Annual Register 1921, p. 74.

of the Harmsworth Press fastened, with a sound tactical instinct, on "anti-waste" as the cry most likely to be damaging to its arch-enemy, and therefore to be bawled through all the megaphones at the command of Lord Northcliffe's now fast-clouding intelligence.

In the summer a form of pressure was applied to Mr. Lloyd George, that he already had good reason to remember, in the shape of a manifesto by the Parliamentary rank and file, bearing 170 signatures, nearly all of them Conservative. This was addressed to Mr. Austen Chamberlain, who had taken over the Conservative leadership from Mr. Bonar Law, but it was quite evident for whose address it was really intended. It expressed grave concern at the extravagant habits of the Government, and in particular at its freedom in disposing of public money without Parliamentary sanction. It came to this, that either there had got to be a drastic reduction of expenditure, or the back benchers would take matters into their own hands, even if it involved splitting the Coalition from top to bottom. Mr. Lloyd George, perceiving the way the wind was blowing, adjusted his course to it with his accustomed skill. A committee of business men was appointed, to devise the ways and means of effecting economies, under the Presidency of Sir Eric Geddes, who having finished his reorganization of the railways, was now ready to resign his post as Minister of Transport. Sir Eric enjoyed an immense prestige, as of a being from a higher sphere—that of big business—who had descended into the fields of politics. Embodying, as he did, the popular idea of the superman, it was only appropriate that a scheme of economy of which he was the father should be christened the Geddes Super-axe. A better appointment could not have been made for the purpose of silencing the malcontents.

It was early in the following year that the report—or rather three reports—of this committee were issued. There could be no question of the thorough-



ness with which the axe had been applied—economies were suggested totalling in all £86 millions. But it is one thing to talk of economy in the abstract, and another—usually a desperately unpopular one—to apply it in the concrete. And the axe, among other things, had been laid to the root of the educational services—the salaries of teachers were to be docked, and children were to start their schooling at 6, instead of 5. It was urged, with some plausibility, that children who started school at 6 tended to turn out *no worse scholars than those who started at 5*. But a direct attack on such a highly-organized and influential body as that of the teachers was not practical politics, and though the children's mothers may not have bothered so much about the purely educational aspect of the entrance age, they did find it highly convenient to have their infants taken off their hands and looked after gratis—even by compulsion. So both these proposals went by the board. The Admiralty was able to declare the safety of the nation imperilled if these amateurs were permitted to cut down funds and man-power beyond certain limits. And there were niggling economies, like the erection of sixpenny turnstiles at the British Museum, that the public were not prepared to stand. So that the Government had no choice but to apply its own axe to the economy proposals, and not even to aim at taking off more than 64 of the proposed 85 millions. Even so, the effort was enough to preclude any idea of planned reconstruction or ambitious social reform. To all intents and purposes, the domestic policy of the Government had come to a dead stop, the only advance of any note that was made in either 1921 or 1922 taking the form of certain minor but significant experiments in Protection, or, as it was called, the safeguarding of key industries. This laying of the first parallel for a renewed Unionist assault on the Free Trade citadel, was hardly calculated to ease the position of the following of Liberals that Mr. Lloyd George had brought with him into the Coalition.

But by hook or by crook, Sir Robert Horne, who had succeeded Mr. Chamberlain at the Exchequer, was able to effect the long-awaited relief of Taxation. The income tax, whose standard rate had stuck so long at the war-time figure of 6s., was at last, in his 1922 Budget, reduced to 5s. Even this was only effected by the dubious financial expedient of making no provision out of revenue for the repaying of debt. But the taxpayer had long got past the point of pedantic insistence on the canons of sound finance, and besides, for the next year or two, Chancellors of the Exchequer were to find themselves in the happy position of having substantial surpluses to dispose of, partly, no doubt, owing to the economy axe, but partly also to the fall of prices and drop in the numbers of the unemployed from the colossal peak figure of over 2½ millions of May, 1921, to 1,936 thousand in January of 1922 and 1,463 thousand a year later—after which it continued steadily but slowly on the down grade. A 5s. income tax, with a million and a half workers standing idle, was a small enough mercy, in all conscience.

Mr. Lloyd George, the man of the people and the orator of Limehouse, was not without reminders that the income tax payer, championed by the Conservative back benchers, was not the only person whose grievances he had to reckon with. No doubt, as judged by the standards of other nations, the Government's scheme of unemployment insurance was both advanced and humane. Even in rich America, the unemployed had to shift for themselves as best they might, and in Soviet Russia the standard of living, even of the average employed labourer, was below that of the average British dole drawer. But though actual starvation was practically unknown, and the direst extreme of want seldom attained, the lot of the unemployed worker was not only far from enviable, even physically, but depressing and demoralizing to the last degree. It is not enough for the human being just to keep body and soul together. It is as true

now as when Aristotle wrote, that the free citizen demands not only to live, but to live well. And in no sense of the words—except as they might have been used by some ascetic of the Theban desert—is it possible to live well when the housekeeping money is liable to have disappeared before the end of the week, and when it may be a question of some one, usually the mother, going short in order that the others may have enough.

During the Autumn of 1921, discontent was scething in all the industrial districts. This frightful new phenomenon of unemployment so far above the million mark was received in anything but a resigned spirit by those affected or threatened by it. Like the Westerners they were, they instinctively believed that every social evil was capable of yielding to human effort, and therefore, that the scandal of its continued existence must be laid at somebody's door. If those in authority did their jobs, they would, in one way or another, see that jobs were provided for everybody else. If they didn't, it was plain proof that they were incompetent—or worse.

Perhaps the unemployed would not all have put it in quite such startling economic terms as it was put to the present author about this time, by a good lady who, if she is still alive, has a vote that counts as much as any man's in shaping the destinies of nations :

"That Lloyd George must be a very wicked old man. He knows that things cost twice as much to poor people as before the War, and yet he goes and puts up prices twice as high," but that was undoubtedly the spirit. And it was a spirit that Mr. Lloyd George himself, and his colleagues, had done their utmost to justify. Neither at election time—nor indeed now—would they have dared to admit that there were social diseases for which it was beyond the utmost of their science and skill to think out a present remedy.

To the unemployed themselves, and to the extremists who fanned their discontent, the problem presented itself in a simple light. A man, willing to

work, had a right to a man's wage, whether the community provided him with a job or not. The unemployed themselves sought to intimidate local authorities into granting their demands, and there were riots at places so wide apart as Dundee, Bristol and Liverpool. But the Minister of Health, Sir Alfred Mond, a business magnate, whose thick voice and ultra-Semitic profile qualified him, in proletarian eyes, for the embodiment of Capitalism, laid it down that relief was to be granted on a scale definitely inferior to that ruling for wages. The decision was inevitable, if only for the reason that the rates, already swollen to unprecedented proportions, could not have been loaded with this huge additional burden without precipitating a descent into bankruptcy. But there were murmurings, both loud and deep, and the members of one East End Borough Council, that of Poplar, contrived, by defaulting on certain obligations, to get themselves sent to jail in a body, as a protest in favour of "work or maintenance," and also of a pooling of rates, between the poorer and richer boroughs, to render this possible.

Meanwhile Mr. Lloyd George, harassed by the crucial negotiations with Sinn Fein, and by the endless problem of Reparations, beyond the limits even of his physical endurance, had retired for a brief respite, under his doctor's orders, to the North of Scotland. But even here he was pursued, in defiance of all protests, by a party of London Labour mayors, who succeeded in running him down at Gairloch, and making him not only listen but reply to their speechifying. If talk and goodwill could have cured unemployment, cured it would have been. There was endless discussion—interviews with representative manufacturers and financiers; a committee formed of all the strongest members of the Cabinet; a brief Autumn session at which unemployment was the dominating issue; 10 millions earmarked for relief works; £300,000 for assisting emigration; a loan to be raised for promoting employment, and guaran-

reed to the extent of 25 millions; unemployed insurance to be extended to cover workers' dependents. All of which was excellent in intention, and generous for a Parliament bent on economy. But the hard core of unemployment remained untouched. It was doubtful whether it would ever yield to direct assault.

Mr. Lloyd George had come up against a snag of reality that defied even his powers of improvisation.

CHAPTER XIV  
SHIPWRECK AT GENOA

Those who marked the signs of the times could not fail to be conscious, ever since the departure of Mr. Bonar Law from the Government, of the increasingly precarious tenure on which Mr. Lloyd George held his Premiership. But that he was heading for a fall, at any time in the near future, hardly the boldest would have dared to predict. His vitality was as great as ever, and his power of recovery, even from the most awkward situation, was well known. Even his helplessness to lay the spectre of unemployment and his increasing estrangement from his Conservative followers might not matter so much, if by some resounding triumph of policy he could establish his power and prestige on unassailable foundations.

For he was not only a British, but a European—even a world statesman. And if his wizardry could conjure peace and a lasting settlement out of the imbroglio of relations between victors and vanquished in the Great War, he would have earned a reputation second to that of no statesman in history.

The tragi-comedy of the Reparations dragged on its weary course throughout 1921. There were the usual demands for fantastically impossible sums by the Allies, the usual shuffling evasions by the Germans.

In January the Allies at last formulated their total demands at a modest figure exceeding 11 thousand millions. To this the Germans responded by an offer reducing the 11 to 1½, which was more than the Allies were ever likely to get, and more than they ever did get. But at the time it was merely regarded as a piece

of Boche impertinence, justifying a resort to violence. In March an ultimatum was drawn up and presented by Mr. Lloyd George himself, and immediately afterwards Allied troops crossed the Rhine and seized three German towns—a step of very doubtful legality. As this form of persuasion still proved ineffective, a fresh turn was given to the screw. A new threat was produced—the Allies would invade Germany and seize on the Ruhr Basin, the centre of her industrial life. This also bore the signature of Mr. Lloyd George, who, in a speech at Birmingham on May 2, explicitly stated that Germany could pay the bill presented to her if she had a mind to, that the Allies had never been more united, and that the claim was a righteous one and must be enforced. The claim had, by the way, got altered to approximately 6½ thousand millions—not that a few odd milliards on or off made the least practical difference.

The Germans had meanwhile made another offer, undertaking to supply labour and materials to repair the devastation in the invaded districts, and also to saddle themselves, up to the limit of their capacity, with the Allied debts to America. But it was money and not labour that the French required, nor had any of the Allies yet awakened to the fact that the best they could hope from Germany was the squaring of their own account with America. So, having on the breastplate of righteousness, they persisted in the time-honoured demand of your money or your life, and the Germans gave way—on paper—pledging themselves to pay a fantastic annuity, and actually contriving to raise the instalment immediately due.

This victory was doubly disastrous for the victors. Its effect was that of a Caesarian operation on the unfortunate goose from which one golden egg was thus untimely ripped. The whole structure of German finance was in a state of hopeless collapse. Every effort to pay had the effect of increasing the already huge deficit on the Budget, a deficit that could only be met by setting the printing presses at work to

debase the currency. The Mark, the unit of value, which had stood before the war at 4·2 to the Dollar, and after it at 14, had been forced above 50 after the Spa Conference in the previous year. The success of the Allied ultimatum in May started it bounding down, like a rock loosened from the mountain side, faster and faster towards the abyss. The hundred was passed in September, and by April next year that figure had been trebled.

There is no profit in calling on a man to stand and deliver, when his purse and pockets are stuffed with wastepaper. And this would obviously be the position of Germany in a very short time. She had endeavoured to raise money by borrowing from a foreign banking house, but had been turned from the door with a pointed reference to her quite impossible obligations. Mr. Keynes, writing in August, 1921, predicted that some time between February and August, 1922, Germany would succumb to inevitable default."<sup>1</sup> As it turned out, as early as December, 1921, her Government announced its inability to pay more than a fraction of forthcoming instalments. And its figures were, in substance, incontrovertible.

But the financial ruin of Germany was a minor evil compared with the mental and spiritual ruin that this policy of Shylock in arms was bound to bring in its train. Again and again it had been proclaimed, by those best qualified to speak for England, that her sons had gone forth to battle to crush not a people but a spirit, the spirit of violence and greed that had, for centuries, inspired the rulers of Prussia, and, through them, come to dominate Germany. And now, for the time being, Germany had become de-Prussianized. Her Constitution was Liberal; her rulers were peaceful civilians, whose policy—within the limits of reason—was one of treaty fulfilment. But if Germany was to be loaded with impossible demands and put on the rack for failure to comply, then inevitably, sooner or later, there must come a

<sup>1</sup> *A Revision of the Treaty*, p. 71.



reversion to the old militarism, and perhaps a discipline of Blood and Iron of which even Bismarck had never dreamed.

This was not hidden from Mr. Lloyd George. In spite of his appearance at France's side; in spite of his having joined with her in two ultimatums; in spite of the sanction he had given to the principle of distraint by invasion, he was genuinely anxious to moderate the intransigence of her demands, and to bring this business of Reparations out of the Cloud-cuckoo-land of astronomical figures into the regions of sanity.

It was not only a question of economics. The disingenuousness of France's policy was partly accounted for by the fact that she herself had been duped at Versailles into giving up her claims to the Rhine line, in return for an Anglo-American guarantee of her security which neither Power had ratified. Might it not be possible to supply the deficiency by a British guarantee, and to make this the foundation of a reasonable settlement?

A master plan was beginning to shape itself in Mr. Lloyd George's mind. He would first apply the imaginative sympathy that was the strongest feature of his statesmanship, to the conclusion of a new *entente* with France, that would have the effect of removing her grievances, and aligning her in really cordial co-operation with Britain. This would be followed up by a Conference of all the European nations, including not only the ex-enemy Powers, but also Bolshevik Russia, with the object of coming to a reasonable, all-round settlement, that should lay the foundations of a new era of peaceful prosperity for victors and vanquished alike.

But the ill luck that had dogged Mr. Lloyd George ever since the Election of 1918 was never more cruelly displayed than in the events that followed. In the first days of 1922, fresh from his success—fatal to him as a politician—in negotiating the Irish Treaty, the English Premier hurried to the sunny skies and blue waters of the Riviera for another of those interminable

Reparations Conferences, and also for the opportunity of a heart-to-heart talk with his French colleague, M. Aristide Briand, who was, like himself, a Celt, and with something of the Celt's quick and sympathetic intelligence. The two understood each other thoroughly, and it was common ground to them that France's mentality was governed less by the desire for Reparations, than by a haunting fear for her own security, a fear that the victory, ironically enough, had only served to drive deeper. This Mr. Lloyd George endeavoured to allay by an offer of Quixotic generosity. England would—asking nothing in return—undertake to come to her former ally's aid, as she had in 1914, in the event of unprovoked aggression by Germany. M. Briand was inclined to scrutinize this gift horse somewhat narrowly—French honour would not be satisfied unless the guarantee was mutual, and reinforced by a technical military convention that British public opinion would never have tolerated. But with the good will to a settlement that actuated both statesmen, these differences ought not to have been incapable of adjustment, and then the way would have been clear for a settlement, on generous lines, of the issues to be discussed in the forthcoming European Conference at Genoa.

But there occurred one of those accidents that would seem to be the work of some malignant imp, with a power over human destiny. Mr. Lloyd George was a golfing enthusiast, with all the typical golfer's love of imparting his mystery. He persuaded M. Briand to accept a lesson from him on the Cannes Links. That lesson may not have succeeded in making a golfer of M. Briand, but it did succeed in altering the course of history. The nerves of Paris were on edge—the arts of the Welsh Wizard were as gravely suspect as those of any sixteenth-century witch. And the spectacle of France's chosen representative foonzling and cutting divots under the severe or pitying eye of the intriguing Briton, was too much to be borne. Such a man could not be expected to succeed in the ruthless

bargaining that is the French idea of diplomacy. M. Briand must be thrown from office—never a very difficult operation in the French Chamber—and replaced by a safe man, who could be trusted to look after the interests of France first, last, and all the time. That man was forthcoming in M. Poincaré.

This formidable personage was perfectly hit off by Mr. Lloyd George as "the most un-French Frenchman I ever met," and as possessing "neither humour nor good humour."<sup>1</sup> Nobody ever discovered a way of appealing either to his reason or his heart. He had the mind of a lawyer, without the ordinary lawyer's flexibility. Even his courage had been suspect, since as President, he had led a panic flight of the French Government to Bordeaux in the early days of the War. But his obstinacy, like his hatred, was invincible. And his most deep-seated hatred was one towards Germany, which, as a Lorrainer, living right on the frontier of the conquered provinces, he had inherited from the remembered humiliation of 1870, and which his own personal humiliation of 1914 had by no means diminished. His method of dealing with Germany was an improvement on that of Shylock, for he would insist not only on the last farthing of the bond, but on as much more as violence or chicanery could possibly extract from the victim. It is uncertain to this day whether in his heart of hearts he really believed that it was possible to screw out of her the fantastic sums he demanded, or whether, by driving her into default, he sought an excuse for plundering and crippling her so that she would never again be a bugbear to the most neurotic Frenchman. Perhaps he was not quite clear in his own mind. But his actions had all the clear-cut simplicity of complete lack of imagination.

Mr. Lloyd George was soon made to realize how hopelessly that ill-starred game on the links had bunkered all his hopes of a European settlement. M. Poincaré had only one idea, and that was to engineer

<sup>1</sup> *Reparations and War Debts*, p. 67.

the earliest possible opportunity of putting into force that threat of a Ruhr invasion in which Mr. Lloyd George himself had been complaisant enough to join. His first action was to wreck the proposed Guarantee Treaty—France would provide her own guarantees of safety. His next move was to wreck the Genoa Conference. He refused even to attend it, and he instructed his delegates to sabotage it. He declared point blank in a public speech that the French would only remain at Genoa on condition that no concessions were made either to Germany or to Russia. He refused even to permit the discussion of one iota of the Versailles Treaty, or to consider any pact of non-aggression that limited France's own right of aggression in pursuit of her claims.

Never had a more imposing gathering been assembled than this of Genoa; never had higher hopes been raised. The greater Powers, with the exception of Russia, still retained their faith in freedom and democratic institutions. There was still a chance for the advocates of international co-operation and goodwill to make their voices heard. But the sands were running out, and more rapidly than was realized. If the delegates noticed the presence of a few young men in black shirts in the Genoese streets, it is improbable that they attached any special significance to them.

But the lawyer from Lorraine, with his stocky form and cotton umbrella, was in a position to impose an absolute veto on hopes of concord that the Pope himself, in a beautiful letter, had blessed. Even Mr. Lloyd George's matchless powers of eloquence and persuasion were as fruitless as rain upon the desert. The delegates could only meet and talk, but M. Poincaré, in Paris with his eye fixed on the Ruhr, could prevent anything being done.

Whatever faint hopes there might have been of a successful issue were dashed, only a few days after the Conference had opened, by the news that Germany and Russia, those two friendless members, had come together and concluded an agreement of their own.

It was harmless enough in substance, providing for a mutual cancellation of war claims and a resumption of normal relationships. But as a gesture, its effect was devastating. Here was Germany striking out a line of her own in the teeth of the Conference, seeking for new friends—perhaps even for allies. For who knew what might lie behind this new agreement? As a matter of fact there was nothing whatever behind it, and except as a gesture of self-assertion, it counted for little more than the paper on which it was written. It was born of the desire of the German Foreign Minister, Walther Rathenau, to give back to his country some measure of her almost forfeited self-esteem.

After such a beginning and under such handicaps, it is small wonder that the Conference should have petered out in talk. It was fine talk, some of it, particularly a speech of Rathenau's which he concluded by echoing Petrarch's cry of "Oh peace! peace! peace!" In so far as the nations had been got together at all to debate the reconstruction of Europe, there was something gained, but there was an opportunity missed that would never recur with quite such favourable chances. Within a few months after the Conference, Italy abandoned herself to a cult of "sacred egoism", and Rathenau, Germany's greatest Post-war statesman, was done to death by ruffians destined to canonization in a very different Germany from that of his dreams. Within a year M. Poincaré had done his bit for the coming of this new Germany by launching his invading armies.

Mr. Lloyd George was visibly tottering to his fall. His European policy was in ruins. He had tried to combine two contradictory roles. It was too much to expect that after putting his signature to such ultimatums as those launched at Germany in the previous year, he would persuade the nations to forsake the paths of anarchy for those of peaceful reconstruction. But it is only fair to add that no statesman could possibly have succeeded in the face of M. Poincaré's veto. That was as strong as death.

## CHAPTER XV

### EGYPT IN BONDAGE

A narrow and unimaginative psychology has the effect of rendering wholly unintelligible many of the outstanding events of history. We record that these things have happened, as we might the appearance of a hippogriff on the tennis lawn—and leave it at that. Thus, after the end of the War, we notice a great spiritual and political upheaval of what, in common parlance, is known as the East. It extends all the way from China to Morocco, like one of those volcanic upheavals that in distant geological ages set the earth's crust folding into mountain ranges. India is caught by it, Iraq and Palestine, Afghanistan and Persia and Turkey. The vast bulk of Russia heaves responsive. It is as if some wide-embracing secret society were at work, co-ordinating the whole movement, with objects clearly defined.

This analogy of the mountain folding requires to be scrutinized. For, if we are to trust the geologists, the surge of mountains, from Himalayas to Pyrenees, was as simple, in its essence, as the creasing of a piece of paper—a single though inanimate, and perhaps enormously prolonged, action. The twentieth-century upheaval of the East has just the same appearance of oneness. But how is this possible? By what process can we conceive of the same faith and purpose passing like the influenza from the wharves of Shanghai to the *mountain fastnesses of Afghanistan*, the *bazaars of India*, the *sands of Arabia*, and the *foothills of the Atlas*? How, indeed, in the previous century, had that mysterious impulse been communicated that

started hitherto loyal regiments murdering their officers all over Bengal and Oudh, and drifting to the magnetic centres of Delhi and Lucknow—an impulse of which the most understanding Europeans were well aware before it gathered the head of mutiny?

Unless we are to allow of a psychological force akin to telepathy, a force of which we have abundant evidence in the animal and insect worlds, capable of communicating itself through other gates than those of eye and ear, and making the hive or herd or horde function instinctively as one individual, we can only confess our incapacity to bridge the gap between certain causes, and their effects in mass sentiment.

We can hardly fail to recognize one of the main causes of this Eastern upheaval in the amazing success of Westernized Japan, whose victory over Russia had been felt like an electric shock all over Asia—a victory whose effect was to recapture for the East the greatest land Power in the world. The spectacle of the Western Powers, during four years, blasting each other to pieces, cannot have been without its effect on the Eastern consciousness. But during the War, the East lay quiet, or fought loyally under Western banners. It was only after the Peace that the new movement had germinated long enough to bear fruit in open revolt. England, as the Western Power with the greatest Eastern possessions, was most directly affected.

How India had first reacted to the stimulus, we have already seen. More remarkable, because a wholly senseless and irrational manifestation, was the sudden attack launched by Afghanistan, under a new, young, Westernizing Ameer, on India, in the early spring of 1919, following almost immediately upon the disturbances in the Punjab. That a small and barbarous nation should without provocation have flung itself at the great British Empire, then fully armed and in the first flush of victory, can only be accounted for as the result of a blind urge, like that which drives the lemming rats every year from their mountains into the sea. The invasion was held off with the greatest

ease—it never even arrived. Aeroplanes hummed over the mobilizing hordes, and they soon had had enough of it. But there was no counter-invasion—no march to Kabul, as in the three previous Afghan Wars. It was, in fact, almost as impossible for England to advance as it was for Afghanistan. Her white troops still largely consisted of Territorials, impatient to be demobilized. She had no money to throw away—public opinion was dead against adventures in arms. So the Ameer was allowed to get away with a Peace Treaty in which England abandoned such suzerainty as she had hitherto exercised, along with the payment of an annual bribe in consideration thereof. It was a sensible though unheroic bargain. There was no danger of another Russian advance on India for quite an indefinite time, and the wily Afghan could be trusted, gratis, not to let himself be gobbled up.

Then there was the spectacle of the Mesopotamian Arabs, whom England had "delivered" from the Turk, exploding into revolt against their saviours, and only being put down after a good deal of trouble and expense.

Still more remarkable was the case of Persia. That country had lain quite passive when, before the War, England and Russia had cut her up into two spheres of influence, or exploitation, with a sort of No Man's Land between, which England secretly bargained with Russia, during the War, to absorb into her own sphere. In 1919, Lord Curzon, who knew Persia better than any other Englishman, was able to get a treaty signed with her which, while safeguarding her independence, would have put her entirely under English influence. But that treaty was never ratified. Persian Nationalism was born and sprang full-armed to aggressive maturity. Soviet Russia, which was ready to deal with Persia on a basis of equality as one Eastern Power with another, was able to offer terms more acceptable. The English treaty was torn up. The English advisers were sent about their business, and England accepted the situation with her



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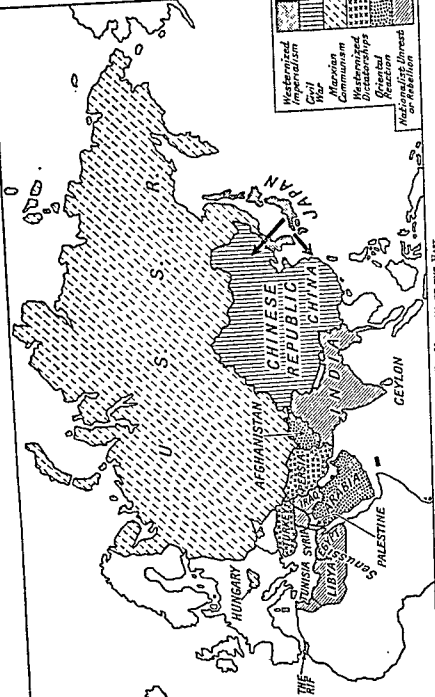
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3. THE POST-WAR UNREST OF THE EAST.

customary philosophy. Probably in the long run it was better to have these buffer states of India completely free, and determined to maintain their freedom, than in a position of spineless and probably disgruntled dependence.

For Aghanistan and Persia, with Iraq to be added to them as soon as she had been set on her feet and turned loose to her own devices, would be so many potential Belgiums over which an invader of India would have to march. The more fiercely Nationalist they were, the more likely they would be to imitate Belgium's attitude.

But the most important approach to India was no longer from the North-West, nor by way of the Persian Gulf. We have already tried to show how the principal members of the British Commonwealth of Nations, as well as the United States, fringed the wide-embracing circumference of the Indian-Pacific Ocean. But there was one conspicuous exception, that of Great Britain herself. Her direct line of communication with that ocean led through two stretches of enclosed waterway, which themselves were joined by the artificial bottle-neck of the Suez Canal. By a prophetic intuition similar to that which we observe shaping the course of animal evolution, she had seized, long before the Canal was built, upon the vital points of this line,—Gibraltar, Malta,<sup>1</sup> Aden. And after the Canal had been built, we find her driven, as if by some irresistible propulsion, to fasten on Egypt, in whose territory it lay.<sup>2</sup> It was no part of England's conscious ambition, least of all that of her great, Liberal pacifist, Gladstone, under whose auspices British troops smashed their way over the corpses of Egyptian patriots to Cairo. She claimed no sovereignty; she had no formal *locus standi*. Her statesmen again and again protested—

<sup>1</sup> Note the fierce and unscrupulous grip that at the beginning of last century, she fastened on Malta, while she let her old conquest of Minorca slip out of her hands again, as a thing not worth bothering about.

<sup>2</sup> See map, p. 180.

without conscious dishonesty—her intention to clear out of Egypt at the first opportunity. And meanwhile she continued to govern and occupy the country. A Continental Power would have appropriated Egypt, at the first opportunity, as France had appropriated Tunis and Italy Tripoli, and made no bones about it. But to rivet his sovereignty on an unconsenting people by right of conquest would be profoundly shocking to John Bull's conscience. But it is unfortunately Mr. Bull's way, under the pressure of overmastering necessity, not to let his conscience know what his right hand doeth.

There was worldly wisdom in it too. For a yoke that does not exist in theory, and is always about to be removed, is easier to bear than one openly and cynically proclaimed. The Egyptians neither loved nor wanted the English; they accepted the benefits incidental to their rule without thanks; but, though with increasing disaffection, they endured it. It put matters on an altogether different footing when, during the War, England threw off the mask, and openly proclaimed a Protectorate of Egypt, which meant that Egypt was now coloured pink, as part of the British Empire. And during the War, British rule bore more hardly on Egypt than ever before. Empires at war must exploit their resources to the full, but the Egyptian peasant who found his grain or donkey requisitioned, and perhaps his own labour conscripted, could hardly be expected to console himself with the thought that somebody else's King and country needed all this.

But during the War, Egypt lay quiet, and even when the Turk approached the Canal, showed no disposition to rise and help him. Egyptian fellahen did humble but excellent service in the rear of the Palestine Expeditionary Force, while England was following in the track of the great Thothmes III and conquering back the old Egyptian empire up to the Hittite frontier and the fords of Carchemish. And then, after the literal battle of Armageddon, the most

resounding victory in the whole history of the East, when Britain stood at the height of her power and prestige, that strange volcanic impulse that thrilled from end to end of the Orient affected Egypt at almost the same time and to the same purpose as Afghanistan. The Egyptian was no fighter, and his response was less of a rebellion than the convulsive wriggling of a trapped animal. In the Nile Valley and the Delta mob law for a short time reigned supreme; there were brutal outrages, but nothing which British flying columns were not able to put down with ease.

Here, again, was a situation with which a Continental Power would have known how to deal. France was to show the way in Syria, which she had been allowed to appropriate as mandatory of the League of Nations. At the first sign that her new subjects objected to her yoke, she asserted her *imperium* with fire and sword, and did irreparable damage by her bombardment of the ancient city of Damascus. But this logic of tyranny was impossible for Britain. There were limits to even John Bull's power of self-deception. The mere fact of his having asserted a Protectorate over a people who quite obviously did not want to be protected, made it impossible for him to evade any longer the issue of whether he meant to hold Egypt by simple right of might, or to apply to her those principles of freedom and self-determination that were part of his very soul.

It was a bitter dilemma, because he also felt, with something deeper than reason, that he could not and dared not abandon his hold on the gateway to the Eastern Ocean—and of that pylon, Egypt and Palestine were the flanking pillars.

Would it not be possible to come to some arrangement with the Egyptians that should safeguard his interest in the Canal without violating their freedom? England had not the least real desire to play the Pharaoh—let Egypt have her Sovereign and her Parliament, let her enjoy all the forms of independence, only let her turn a blind eye to khaki uniforms

in Cairo. But this was just what the Egyptian did not see his way to do. He felt about it much as a Londoner would have felt about a Chinese garrison in the Tower—with even the most discreet mandarin in command. He wanted the English out of his country, bag and baggage—that and nothing less.

But not even this would have satisfied him, for he also wanted them to clear out from the Soudan province that he had governed, or rather grossly misgoverned, until the Soudanese Mahdi had applied "bag and baggage" to him, and which had been conquered back by the strong arm of Lord Kitchener. His right to garrison Khartoum had no stronger moral basis than the British right to garrison Cairo, and yet the Egyptian felt that it was as vital for him to control the upper waters of the Nile as it was for England to safeguard the Canal.

So that the stage was set for a very pretty moral and political drama, one whose ramifications space does not permit us to pursue. From the English point of view it was a story of fecklessness, of procrastination, of missed opportunities. It was imperative to seek every means of conciliating or compromising with Egyptian Nationalism, before it had grown to unmanageable proportions, and hardened against any settlement whatever.

That Nationalism had no great controlling personality, like that of Gandhi. Its leader was a certain Zaghlul Pasha, one of the old group of patriots who had gathered round Arabi Pasha in 1882. He resembled Gandhi only in being a lawyer, and his outlook was not perceptibly wider than that of any other extremist politician. He could be trusted to play the game, and the skin game, for his side, and he had the gift of inflaming patriotic sentiment in multitudes of simple men. The other Egyptian politicians, the ministers of the shadowy potentate who was nominal ruler of the country, were scarcely more than the shadows of a shadow.

In 1919, England, or rather the English Govern-

ment, had other things to think about than Egypt. They procrastinated, while Nationalism was capturing the country and perfecting its own organization. They recalled Zaghlul from banishment, and allowed him to be snubbed when he turned up on his country's behalf at the Peace Conference. It was only at the end of 1919 that a Commission set out, under Lord Milner, to investigate the whole matter of England's relations with Egypt under the Protectorate. But by that time Nationalism and Zaghlul had got such a hold that the Commission was boycotted, and its very members stood in need of constant protection.

The whole of 1920 was passed in negotiation, and it was not till the last day but one of the year that the report of the Commission was issued, recommending the scrapping of the Protectorate and as large a *measure of Egyptian independence as was consistent with the safeguarding of the Canal*. But the Government, instead of accepting the report and acting on it, raised objections, and 1921 passed in procrastination and haggling, while the situation in Egypt got steadily worse. It was not till February 28th, 1922, that after Lord Allenby, the High Commissioner, had come to the verge of resignation, the Government at last decided to toe the line and recognize Egypt as an independent state—though that independence was rendered somewhat problematical by England's undertaking not only the protection of the Canal but the defence of Egypt against aggression, a duty that can hardly be performed effectively without a garrison. This was followed up by a declaration in which England informed the world that she would tolerate no interference by any Power, other than herself, in the affairs of Egypt.

So, though the form of the Protectorate was dropped, the position of Egypt remained as contradictory as ever. She was independent, and not free to use her independence. And by this time her Nationalism, thoroughly inflamed, had united the whole country in one passionate hatred of the British



occupation. The Wafd, Zaghlul's party, was assured of an overwhelming majority in any representative body that could be convened. England had only got rid of her Irish incubus, to take to herself another Ireland on the banks of the Nile.

It was no doubt a task requiring a genius almost superhuman, to reconcile Britain's necessity with Egypt's goodwill. There was one man, and one only, whose genius might have been equal to the miracle. This was Colonel Lawrence, whose exploits in organizing and carrying to victory the Arab revolt against the Turk had signalized him as the one leader of authentic genius—as distinct from painstaking competence—the War had produced. No European had ever equalled Lawrence's capacity for understanding the minds of Orientals and capturing their affections.

The idea was actually mooted of sending Lawrence out to Egypt in the capacity of High Commissioner. Such an appointment would, in itself, have been a stroke of genius, and by making it Mr. Lloyd George's Government might conceivably have added the solution of the Egyptian to that of the Irish problem. But it was not to be. The methods of genius are too profoundly shocking to minds unkindled by its fire. The impossible fellow proposed to dispense with the pomp and ceremony of officialdom, and go about—like Haroun al Raschid—among the people themselves, getting their sentiments and opinions at first hand. This was too much to be borne. The fact that a series of intensely-dignified proconsuls had not prevented British overlordship from stinking in the nostrils of Egypt, had nothing to do with the case. A Commissioner who trusted to the force of his own personality, without the artificial support of trapping and ceremonial—*infandum*!

And so the services of Lawrence came to be utilized—and that grudgingly—in the capacity of private soldier, while the *Car of State*, with all due pride, pomp and circumstance, remained stuck fast in the sands of Egypt.

## CHAPTER XVI

### CHANAK

The failure to conciliate Egypt was not seriously felt on the British Home Front. So long as there was no actual crisis, involving the threat of war or additional taxation, the Englishman in the street was content that the men on the spot should manage or muddle things in their own way. The morrow could take thought for the things of itself.

More serious were the repercussions when the impulse of Nationalist revival, that thrilled through the East, reached that traditional Sick Man of Europe who had now, to all appearance, become the Dead Man, and whose corpse it was proposed to cast out in some bare spot amid the Anatolian Highlands, the only part of the once mighty Ottoman Empire that the victors had not arranged to share out among themselves.

Of all the peace-making performances of the Allies, that with Turkey is the one that reflects the least gleam of credit on the morals or intelligence of anybody concerned. The Turk, after General Allenby's annihilation of his whole main army, was so manifestly down and out that no one very much bothered about him. His case could be allowed to stand over till that of the more important delinquents had been disposed of. And meanwhile his territory served as a sort of reserve of loot, out of which any of the victors who happened to be disgruntled with his share of the other enemies' effects, could be invited to help himself. The latter-day crusaders retained at least enough of Christian sentiment not to bother

themselves overmuch with the rights or feelings of mere Turks.

The share out of Turkey had, indeed, been arranged on the most generous lines by those secret, war-time treaties, that the Bolsheviks had already had the bad taste to expose to the light of day. Not only were her European,<sup>1</sup> Arabian, Palestinian, Syrian and Mesopotamian possessions to be torn from her grasp, but even the best part of Asia Minor, to which she was now confined, was to be partitioned out into spheres of influence—or exploitation—for France and Italy. A treaty would be drafted, in the good time of the victors, implementing these arrangements. And what else could the Turks do but accept the situation with that fatalism that is the most convenient quality of the Oriental?

And accepted it might conceivably have been, had not humiliation been piled on injury. The Greeks, whose tardy and qualified support of the Allies in the War had been rewarded with Turkey's leavings in Europe, outside an internationally controlled zone round the Straits, were encouraged by England, France and the United States to steal a march on Italy by occupying, amid scenes of disgraceful brutality, the town and district of Smyrna. To the Turk, the Greek was an hereditary bondman, an object of contempt. That such a heel should be planted on his neck was more bitter than death itself.

But to Mr. Lloyd George, with his love of improvised expedients, nothing could have been more happy than the thought of employing the Greek army to keep the Turk humble and obedient to the will of his conquerors. Not for the first time in the century had English diplomacy discovered a way of getting another people to pull its own chestnuts out of the fire. Lord Curzon, who knew something about the East, did indeed regard the venture with well-grounded apprehension. But then Lord Curzon

<sup>1</sup> Except Constantinople, to be left her under international control.

could survey the situation with a detachment of which the Premier, who had inherited the pro-Greek and anti-Turk bias of romantic Liberalism, was incapable.

A more unfortunate moment could not have been chosen for goading the Turk to desperation. For now the Nationalist revival had begun to stir among the Turanian as it had among the other Eastern peoples. A new hope began to kindle among survivors of that army whose will to victory seemed to have been broken past hope of recovery in a place called Armageddon. The hour brought forth the leader in Mustafa Kemal, an officer whose energy and resource had been the means of saving the Gallipoli Peninsula and Constantinople in 1915.

Kemal was something more than a great captain. He was a revolutionary—and the break that he proposed to effect with the past was quite as startling as those that had already been accomplished in Japan and Russia. For it had been the pride and greatness of Turkey, for centuries, to be the fighting head of Islam. Her Sultan was the Caliph, the Commander of the Faithful. It was in this light that he was regarded by the Mahommedan community of India, and an extremely dangerous agitation was afoot—that might and did develop into open revolt—against the crushing terms to be imposed by the Allies on the Caliph and the people. For the Allies proposed to maintain the Sultan at Constantinople under international control—a mere puppet, that is to say, in the hands of the Western nations. No wonder that Moslems, whose loyalty to British rule had stood the test of war, now only had one thought—how to save the Caliphate.

Their real enemy was not the British Raj, but Mustafa Kemal himself, and it was not the Allies, but a resurrected Turkey, that was to knock the bottom out of their agitation, by making a final end of the Caliphate, and degrading Islam itself to a status resembling that of Christianity in Russia. The Holy Places, the sacred cities of Islam, had been torn from

her beyond the possibility of recovery. To waste her energies in the quest of a Holy Empire would be a mistake as disastrous as that of Germany in the Middle Ages. But the Turkish nation itself, the transplanted horde of Tartar nomads, had itself and its fighting soul to fall back upon. Stripped of its empire it might be, but its home and people it would preserve intact. The New Turkey would boldly cut itself loose from Islam; it would outdo Japan itself in the thoroughness of its Westernization. It would be one more anarchy in the anarchy of Nationalisms. Such was the promised land into which Mustapha Kemal purposed to lead his countrymen.

He was clear in his own mind what he intended to do. Having cut himself loose from Constantinople and the Sultan, he could proceed, in his Anatolian fastnesses, to reorganize his defeated but by no means disarmed countrymen. To master this barren and difficult country would at best be a tedious operation. Every month it was deferred would make it more nearly impossible.

But the Allies were neither clear in their own minds, nor united among themselves. None of them in the least appreciated the significance or seriousness of this new development. None of them had the will or resources for an expedition to Kemal's new capital at Angora. But there was the Greek gamble, and the Premier at Athens, M. Venizelos, was ready and willing to employ the Greek army to snuff out this Kemalist revolt before it had time to become formidable. In the summer of 1920 the Greek forces swept forward, carrying all before them. But then, just as they had got Kemal and his levies on the run, the two Latin Powers, who had bargained for all the pickings of Asia Minor for themselves, put their veto on this upstart competitor. The Greek forces were stopped; the Turks were given breathing space to re-organize. It would have been well for the Greeks at this point had they cut their losses and gone back to Europe, rather than saddle themselves

with the impossible burden of maintaining an army permanently on their Asiatic front.

But the Allies, and particularly Britain, were content to let things drift, and, having got the Greeks to do their dirty work of driving away the Kemalists from the neighbourhood of the Straits, to sit down and wait—not in vain—for something to turn up.

It was a story of selfishness, disloyalty and the evasion of responsibility, and as if this were not enough, of unforeseeable misfortune. The young King of Greece died from a monkey bite, and the Greeks—in fickleness at any rate the true heirs of the ancient Athenians—hastened to register a vote that had the effect of ostracizing Venizelos and restoring the deposed King, Constantine, the notorious opponent of the Allies during the War, who returned amid scenes of hysterical joy suggestive of the recall of Alcibiades. This gave France and Italy a not unwelcome excuse for withdrawing all countenance and support from the Greeks, and set public opinion in England dead against them. Constantine staked everything on what was now the desperate gamble of smashing Kemal in one victorious campaign. But his push was stopped some 40 miles from Angora, and short of evacuating the country, there was nothing for it but to maintain the army in its trenches, at crushing expense, until such time as Kemal might judge that a sudden push would give it the overthrow. The Turk was in no hurry. For nine months he was content to let his enemy remain stuck fast, while the will to win, or even to resist, died out of him.

The English Government had completely lost control over the situation, and made no serious effort to regain it. An unhappy Greek Premier came to London begging for the sinews of war—and received excellent advice. Futile attempts were made to negotiate an armistice. . . .

But while England was marking time, France was acting. She had resolved cynically and deliberately

to abandon the Treaty she had joined with her Allies in dictating to the Sultan's shadow Government, and to conclude a separate one of peace and friendship with Kemal—a thing she was explicitly pledged not to do. A certain M. Franklin Bouillon, an expansive rhetorician, went to Angora, and soon managed to come to a mutually satisfactory arrangement, by which France abandoned her attempt to appropriate a province in Asia Minor, in return for what economic concessions she could get. She did more; for henceforward she was busy giving back arms and ammunition to England's, and her own, enemy of the War. Support of the same kind was coming from another quarter, for Bolshevik Russia was determined to do her damndest, on all occasions, for the overthrow of Western civilization, and judged that the arming of the Turk would conduce to this desirable end.

Meanwhile Mr. Lloyd George's notorious, but now Platonic, affection for Greece, had lost him the support of the ablest of the few Liberals who still remained to keep him in countenance. Mr. Montagu, who knew the strength of the pro-Turk agitation in India, had made so little secret of his own, and the Indian Government's, feelings on the subject, that, to the immense delight of the Conservative Die-hards, who had never forgiven him for his censure of General Dyer, he was driven from office.

In the summer of 1922, it was evident that the catastrophe impending over the Greek adventure could not be much longer delayed. The wretched Constantine, who could only get advice from his British backer while the Turk was getting guns, thought of one last, desperate expedient for saving his face. Constantinople was Turkish—Greece had been put up by the Allies to make war on Turkey. He would withdraw a couple of divisions from his Asiatic lines and use them to occupy Constantinople. That would enable him to retire from Asia Minor without losing his crown. But that, he found, would

not do. Once again the Allies intervened to strike the sword out of Greece's hand. A cordon of Allied, including British troops, barred the way. And Kemal, to whom the departure of the two divisions on their fool's errand had given a superiority of numbers, saw that Allah had delivered his enemies into his hands. He struck with his whole force, and the Greek army dissolved into a terrified mob, bolting as fast as their legs would carry them to the sea coast. The Turks entered Smyrna on their heels, and soon showed that the Greeks were mere amateurs in the gentle art of extermination. The whole of Asia Minor lay at Kemal's feet, for Italy, like France, had wisely dropped the motion of pilfering territory on that mainland.

Here was an appalling situation! For the neutral zone that the Allies were policing round the Straits was no longer covered by the convenient Greek army. And the Turks, flushed with their amazing victory, blood-drunken from the sack of Smyrna, were sweeping on to the conquest of this, and the rest, of their Western territory that still remained of that which had been taken from them in the War. If they entered Constantinople, it could hardly be doubted that such a massacre would take place of Christians as would put even the horrors of Smyrna into the shade. And if the Allies, and particularly the British, allowed themselves to be kicked unceremoniously out of the historic precincts of Gallipoli, it would be a humiliation from which the prestige of the West would never recover.

There was only a handful of Allied troops, British, French, and Italian, to stand in Kemal's path, while the sea and the Straits were held by their fleets. The vital point was constituted by an advanced post, at Chanak, on the Asiatic shore of the Dardanelles, where 300 British infantry, supported by the guns of the fleet, had dug and wired themselves in.

The question could no longer be evaded—were the Turks to be allowed to cross to Europe without



tact and forbearance. But the war group in the Cabinet displayed all the light-hearted pugnacity of the palmiest Jingo tradition. They acted as if they neither expected nor desired to avoid conflict. The Balkans were ostentatiously canvassed for support against the Turk. In a flamboyant manifesto, the Government appealed for the support of the Dominions. If it had wished to disrupt the Commonwealth of Nations, it could have taken no surer way. The least appearance of aggression was fatal to the spontaneous good will that was the only binding force of that alliance. The sentimental appeal of Gallipoli did indeed draw a favourable response from the Antipodes, but that of Canada was ominously temporizing, and made it only too plain that the greatest of the Dominions was no more anxious than the United States to be drawn into the vortex of European politics. Nor did South Africa show any greater enthusiasm.

The effect on France—or perhaps one should say on M. Poincaré—of the British gesture, was to destroy the last pretence of loyalty to the Entente. He was especially furious that Britain should have dated to look to support from those Balkan nations whom France had come to regard almost in the light of vassals. By arrangement between the allied commanders, a Senegalese battalion had taken its post at the side of the British at Chanak. This, by orders from home, now turned tail on the approaching horde, and accompanied by an Italian contingent, made off to the safe side of the Narrows, leaving the British, like an earlier Three Hundred, alone in the post of honour.

Lord Curzon, who, as Foreign Secretary, had had no part in the reckless policy of the Cabinet war group, now hurried over to Paris to see M. Poincaré, and restore the common front of the Entente, thus rudely broken. But the treason was too glaring to pass without protest, and Lord Curzon, with his accustomed dignity, though perhaps less than his accustomed diplomacy, allowed himself to animadvert

on the French disloyalty of which this was the culminating instance. But M. Poincaré's legal acumen was more than equal to the task of bluffing out a weak case. He was elaborately, venomously, offensive. Poor Curzon, whose pompous exterior was the defensive armour of a sensitive invalid, could stand it no longer—he staggered from the room and collapsed in tears, clinging to Lord Hardinge:

"Charley, I can't bear that horrid little man. I can't bear him! I can't bear him!"<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the Turkish columns, footsore but exultant, were beginning to arrive in the neighbourhood of the Straits. At first it seemed as if the crisis were destined to pass off peacefully, since the Turk showed no disposition to go out of his way to try conclusions with the Chanak garrison, and the few of his cavalry, who had entered the so-called neutral zone, complied with a summons to quit. But the desertion of the British by the French and Italians was a dangerous stimulant to the already inflated self-confidence of the victorious army, and a military revolution that chased Constantine from Athens, aroused fears of a closer *liaison* between England and Greece. Turkish troops appeared again in the neutral zone, and this time they swarmed right up to the British wire. Their mood was not unfriendly. The Turk, with all his faults, was a born soldier, and bore no malice for hard knocks. One poor foot slogger, perhaps not altogether in chaff, is said to have asked for the use of a bath!

But the situation was about as dangerous as it could possibly have been. A lost temper, a rifle discharged by accident, would have been as fatal as the drawing of the knight's sword that precipitated King Arthur's last battle. Luckily the General on the spot was Sir Charles—or as the army knew him—Tim Harington, who had already earned the reputation of having been the ablest staff officer on the Western front, and who was now to earn the far higher praise

<sup>1</sup> Curzon. *The Last Phase*, by H. Nicolson, p. 274.

of being the second soldier within the span of a generation—Kitchener being the first—to save his country from a disastrous war by a genius for peace-making diplomacy not usually the product of a military training. The question of peace or war depended on whether he could arrange a meeting with the Turkish commander in time to fix up terms, in consideration of which the Turks would consent to remain peacefully on the Asiatic side, until the time and manner of resumption of Eastern Thrace could be agreed upon.

But before this meeting could take place, the war party in the Cabinet, which seemed to have lost all sense of prudence or responsibility, resolved on cutting the knot then and there with the sword. They wired instructions to Harington to issue an instant ultimatum to the Turks—who would almost certainly have rejected it—that they should stop violating the neutral zone. In vain did the unfortunate Curzon plead for even twenty-four hours' delay. Only two members of the Cabinet had the courage to support him. One of these was the President of the Board of Trade, an unobtrusive gentleman whose name was hardly known to the man in the street—Mr. Stanley Baldwin.<sup>1</sup>

But General Harington, who had the support of the High Commissioner at Constantinople, was determined to have no part nor lot in these bloody-minded proceedings. With a moral courage astonishing in a man under authority, he ignored his instructions, and went quietly on with his task of coming to a peaceful understanding with an enemy who, in his heart of hearts, would be only too glad if he could save his face without fighting. The Cabinet itself, whose fire-eating members sobered down rapidly on discovering that no serious danger had been threatened to the now strongly-reinforced British garrison, hastened to save their own face by thankfully endorsing their commander's disobedience.

<sup>1</sup> Nicolson, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

The cloud was already beginning to pass away. The meeting with Kemal's Second-in-Command, Ismet Pasha, passed off successfully, thanks largely to General Harington's tactful handling of his fellow-soldier. It is said that at one stage of the proceedings he transformed an atmosphere of extreme tension with the words, "And now, Ismet Pasha, I am going to shake hands with you." Against such tactics, even the efforts of M. Franklin Bouillon to make all the mischief he could, were of no avail. There were hitches, even apparent deadlock, but General Harington knew how to be firm as well as conciliatory, and eventually the sensible compromise was reached that the Greeks should be instructed to retire from Eastern Thrace, and that the country should be held in trust for the Turks by Allied detachments, until the arrangement of a formal peace.

Like Beaconsfield, in not dissimilar circumstances, the Government could claim to have achieved peace with honour. The prestige of Britain, which had sunk woefully since the War, shone brighter than ever by comparison with the inglorious figure cut by her late allies. But her success was akin to that of a motorist who charges at full speed round a blind corner and just misses an oncoming vehicle, or rather, to that of a car owner who is saved from a head-on smash by his chauffeur's refusal to obey orders. To have stood firm against an immediate Turkish entry into Constantinople was at least an arguable policy, though—in isolation—a fearfully dangerous one, but to have gambled with the lives of multitudes and to have courted the immeasurable risks of war in a spirit of light-hearted aggressiveness, is something for which one hesitates to seek a name.

The British public was not like that of Greece, that would be satisfied with nothing less than shooting out of hand of the chief instruments of King Constantine's equally reckless gamble in Asia Minor—it would be deterred by no holocausts or risk of holocausts from crediting its military and political leaders with the

best of motives. But it heaved a sigh of relief that was almost audible when the danger passed away. It was in vain that Mr. Lloyd George, in one of his finest, fighting perorations, claimed to have invoked "the might of this great Empire to have protected from indescribable horror men, women and children by the thousand who were trusting to the plighted word of France, Italy, and Britain . . . and who are thanking God at this hour that Britain, Great Britain, has kept her faith." The mention of indescribable horror merely evoked memories of what, according to this same orator, had been a war to end war. And the fact that he had been on the verge of leading the country into another, was enough to set the tide of public opinion flowing irresistibly against Mr. Lloyd George and his Government. That speech was his last—as Premier.

It only remains to add that when, later in the year, a Conference met at Lausanne to conclude peace with Turkey, England reaped the full benefit of her stand at Chanak. Lord Curzon, still Foreign Minister, but no longer to Mr. Lloyd George's Government, dominated the situation with easy mastery. It is true that the Turk got back that portion of his dominions that was inhabited mainly by his own people. England had nothing to lose by his doing so. It is true that to all intents and purposes he resumed his guardianship of the Straits. It was a post that England had fought one war and risked another to keep for him in the past. The Treaty of Lausanne was almost certainly an improvement, from England's point of view, on that which the Allies had originally sought to impose, with its inordinate concessions to French and Italian Imperialism.

There was only one matter on which English and Turkish interests came into serious conflict. This concerned the ownership of the Mosul district of Upper Mesopotamia, which England claimed for her mandatory, Iraq, and whose control had a special value for her on account of its rich oil deposits—not

commercial matter only, since oil was now the life-blood of the Fleet. Here England's prestige stood in good stead, for the Turk, now thoroughly convinced of her willingness to fight, sullenly consented to submit the question of ownership to the judgment of the League of Nations, which eventually upheld the British contention.

Kemal, too deeply absorbed in his task of nation-building to have the will for military adventure, was probably secretly relieved to have the business taken off his hands.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE FALL OF MR. LLOYD GEORGE

Mr. Lloyd George's decline had begun, and gone on steadily, since Bonar Law had retired from his Administration in March, 1921. His fall was precipitated by Bonar Law's return, in the capacity, not of supporter, but of supplanter. When the Chanak crisis was at its height, a letter had appeared in *The Times*, which had never slackened in its vendetta against the Premier, over Bonar Law's signature, roundly condemning the policy of constituting Britain the policeman of Europe. It amounted to a plea for the normalcy towards which public opinion was more and more beginning to incline. And it was a signal to the disgruntled Conservatives that now at last they had an acceptable substitute for Mr. Lloyd George as leader, no longer of a Coalition, but of a True Blue Conservative Government.

What they did not realize was that they were pinning their faith to the leadership of a dying man. Bonar Law's health, that had compelled his retirement a year and a half before, had never recovered. He carried in his body the germs of a mortal disease. Nothing would have induced him to resume harness but an indomitable sense of patriotic duty. As it was, when the time came for him to decide, he had to ask his doctors for how long he was good to hold out. They gave him a year—perhaps two. They were too generous.

The Irish Treaty, though equivalent to a free gift of some 80 votes to the Conservatives, had never been forgiven by the rank and file of the Party. The

ministers who had been responsible for it were marked men—branded with the guilt of treason. The idealism that had sought to create a fusion of party loyalties in the service of the Empire had gone completely out of fashion. The rank and file were frankly anxious to get back to the good old skin game of primary colours. The higher patriotism might be good enough for the platform, but the sort of loyalty that was wanted in practice was that to a political team. Taper and Tadpole were coming back to their own.

The Chairman of the Unionist Party organization was a certain Sir George Younger, a brewer by profession, and unequalled as a puller of wires. It was through his machinations that Mr. Lloyd George's plan earlier in the year, to obtain a new lease of authority for his Coalition by an appeal to the country, had been frustrated. The Premier had scornfully referred to this as a mutiny of the cabin boy—but the mutiny was successful. The wily brewer was resolved to detain his chief a little longer, until his cup—or mug—was full.

Mr. Lloyd George's forlorn hope had been to create a centre party out of his own following of Liberals, and such Conservatives as still remained loyal to him—a group that included his most distinguished colleagues in the Ministry, with the exception, perhaps, of the sorely tried Lord Curzon. But his Administration was losing prestige too fast. There had been some calculatedly indiscreet allegations of the practice, never more rife than since the War, of selling the King's prerogative of granting public honours in order to swell the secret and unaudited funds of the ministerial Caucus. And there had been a complete failure to meet the Unionist demand to amend the dangerously anomalous position of the House of Lords, under the Parliament Act—on account of the only too obvious determination of the Peers themselves to brave the utmost risks of Single Chamber Government, rather than sacrifice the principle of hereditary legislation.



But it was Chanak that caused Mr. Lloyd George's cup to overflow. Public opinion was not in the least disposed to thank him for peace with honour—it was horrified at having only escaped war by so exiguous a margin. As for the Conservative Party—after Mr. Bonar Law's manifesto it was in danger of getting completely out of hand unless something was done. Accordingly Mr. Austen Chamberlain, who had never wavered in his support of Mr. Lloyd George, and who had every reason to believe in the equal loyalty of the Party to himself as its leader, summoned a meeting of Unionist Members to the august precincts of the Carlton Club. It met on October 19. Three days before, at Newport, the Conservatives, in a by-election, had captured the seat from their allies, the Lloyd George Liberals, by a resounding majority.

The general opinion was that the influence of Mr. Chamberlain, Lord Balfour, and their group of elder statesmen, would suffice to bring back the rank and file to their allegiance, after some letting off of rhetorical steam. But Mr. Chamberlain had no sooner made his appeal, than he was followed by Mr. Stanley Baldwin, the still almost unknown minister who had lately taken a stand, in the Cabinet, against the ultimatum to Mustafa Kemal. He had come down fully prepared to sacrifice his political career, not even sure of Bonar Law's support, or presence.

He spoke with an unvarnished impressiveness characteristic of his style, and more effective than any other sort of oratory with an English audience. Admittedly Mr. Lloyd George was a dynamic force, and, said Mr. Baldwin, "a dynamic force is a very terrible thing; it may crush you, but it is not necessarily right." It was a sentence in the grand moral manner worthy of Carlyle, and it gave words to what inarticulate Englishmen were beginning to feel about the Premier. They had called in a wizard to restore their fortunes, and things had been drifting to the devil ever since. They no longer trusted his arts,

and Mr. Baldwin did not fail to point out the blighting effect of his influence first on the Liberal and then on the Conservative Party.

His speech captured the meeting, and not even Lord Balfour could recapture it for the Coalition. It hardly needed the weighty support that was duly forthcoming from Mr. Bonar Law to ensure an overwhelming majority for a motion severing the connection of the Party with its Liberal allies and leader. The news was no sooner reported to Mr. Lloyd George, than he resigned the Premiership.

It was less than four years before that a hero-worshipping electorate had confirmed him in power as the mighty superman capable of adding the blessings of peace to the laurels of victory. Now he was cast down by the very men who had been elected to support him, and whose action the electorate was about to confirm with no uncertain voice. For close upon seventeen years, continuously, he had been a Minister of the Crown—even from the first in the full blaze of the limelight. For another dozen—at the least—not all his prestige and all his persuasiveness would avail to recall him to that service.

Seldom has such glory been followed by such eclipse. And yet, like other eclipses, it might have been capable of prediction. Mr. Lloyd George's greatness, achieved during the War, had been put to the supreme test after the Armistice. Would he, at all costs and all risks, dare to come forward, and tell the nation, according to the light that was in him, the truth and nothing but the truth about its real situation? Would he stand, like a rock, for a peace of justice and magnanimity, and promise no more than he could, or ought to, perform?

He might have failed; he might have fallen; but it would have been a failure more glorious than all his successes, and a fall from which he would have arisen mightier than ever when England drunk had become England sober. Whereas now—it was an England sobered by bitter experience that rejected him.

And yet, however tragically he may have missed the supreme opportunity of his career, history must record that it was under Mr. Lloyd George's auspices that the British cause was carried to victory in the War, and the treaty signed that gave freedom to the two Irelands. That is glory enough for any one statesman.

# BOOK III

## SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS

### CHAPTER I

#### A DERATIONALIZED UNIVERSE

It is curious that it should have been pious Victorians of the Nineteenth Century and not Georgians of the Twentieth who were the more addicted to anticipating the end of the world. For, with less straining of meaning than had been necessary for his predecessors, the Post-war Adventist might have pointed out how accurately the signs of the times were being fulfilled.

"Distress among nations with perplexity . . . men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after these things that are to come, for the Powers of Heaven shall be shaken."

Could there be any more apt summary of the state of mind left, among civilized peoples, in the wake of the War?

The Powers of Heaven were indeed shaken, so much that not only the fabric of civilization but the Solid Universe itself seemed to be dissolving. For the Universe, in so far as it has any meaning for men, is the Universe men know. It had once been a homely and manageable little universe—almost a family party. Dante had had no great difficulty in proceeding on foot, under suitable guidance, from the lowest depth of Hell to the utmost height of Heaven. With the coming of the modern age the Universe had been enlarged, as the world itself had been

enlarged; it had lost its containing spheres as the world had lost its edge; but it had not ceased to be plainly comprehensible—more than ever since Sir Isaac Newton had exposed its workings with such penetrating lucidity. The grand, austere Rationalists of the Nineteenth Century believed that they had frozen God out of the Universe, but, as their very name implied, they left, standing to reason, a solid and respectable universe in which any Victorian could feel at home. You did not need to be a mathematician to understand gravitation—down drops the apple and round goes the world—or a chemist to be satisfied with the thought of those solid and minute atoms, standardized to about 90 assorted patterns, of which the Universe was built up—think of a pea magnified to the size of the earth, and then a few atoms magnified in the same proportion, looking like a heap of cricket balls: it was as simple as all that, if you didn't start trying to conceive of an indivisible cricket ball. And who could read such a book as Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe* without seeing that life had fallen into line with matter, and that the rise of Man out of mud was as simple a process, in essence, as the fall of Newton's apple?

The Universe, like so many other Victorian concerns, might have ceased to be a one man, or a one God property—but an entirely satisfactory and up-to-date business manager had taken over from the late Proprietor. This was a person called Science, because, to a Victorian, Science was always visualized as a sort of person, a God without the title, holy and reverend His name, infinite His power, boundless His salvation to those that with entire faith turned unto Him. To doubters—if anyone had been insane enough to doubt—it might have been a chilling reflection that a man had no more will than a machine and no more endurance than a candle flame, or that the Universe itself was running down and would eventually lie still and dead in the vast, eternal cemetery of space. But as that genial old

Pagan, Edward VII, is reported to have said to Mr. Balfour: "I expect it will last out my time. Let's come and play bridge," and anyhow Science was going to create Heaven on Earth, some time in the interval, which was very nice for those who would be alive at that time.

Even before the War the simplicity of this faith was becoming a little blown upon. The solid, Victorian Universe showed signs of breaking up, or rather of dissolving into something with which thin air would be adamant by comparison. The atom itself, so far from being solid, turned out to be an emptiness vast in proportion to the tiny particles that it contained, not of honest matter, but of something wholly unimaginable, whirlpools of activity without substance.

It was disconcerting, to say the least, to find that the material rock on which you have begun to build is such stuff as the dreams of electricians are made on.

Of course, the new knowledge was another new feather in the cap of Science, but it is not so easy to pin one's faith to a gospel when one is frankly unable to make sense of its teaching. Materialism may not be easy to define philosophically, but to the ordinary man the dogma proclaimed by the *fin-de-siècle* Rationalists had been Materialism, naked and unashamed. Mind was a function of body, and body was grown-up mud, and mud was matter, and matter, plus energy, was all there was in the Universe. A child could understand that much. But nobody whatever could quite understand a matter that had ceased to be material. You can heave a brick through the Church window, but when it comes to a chunk of voltage . . .

The emphasis of Rationalism had after all been less on the physical than on the biological aspect. Evolution had become less a theory, than a sacred dogma or incantation, and woe to the obscurantist who dared to insinuate the faintest doubt about its being "proved"! But the Pre-war years saw the growth

an instant his ability to follow the argument of opposing counsel, or to pass a verdict on what seemed to him a plain issue. In the State of Tennessee, the matter of Man's descent from a monkey was actually referred to the decision of a Court of Law, and on many an evening in Hyde Park it would be thrashed out among groups of disputatious loafers.

But hardly had the excitement of the War died down, than it began to be realized that another scientific revolution had taken place, as momentous as that associated with the name of Darwin. But this time it was a revolution of which nobody, except a very few expert mathematicians, could make head or tail. All that the ordinary man could grasp about it was that a certain Swiss-German Jew, called Einstein, had upset all common-sense ideas of space and time, and that he had actually detected errors in those laws of Newton that had been accepted as unquestioningly, for the two past centuries, as those of the multiplication table. If Einstein had confined his support of these innovations to mathematical demonstration, however cogent, he might not have attracted so much attention. But he did more. He looked out upon a Universe performing its eternal routine, as everybody imagined, in strict conformity with Sir Isaac's principles. "But," said Einstein, "if at such and such a time you will please to observe it closely, you will perceive that it is guilty of minute but definite irregularities—doing things it could not possibly have done if Newton had been right."

And just as St. Patrick had pitted his Christian magic against that of King Loigaire's druids, so did Einstein appeal to signs in the heavens to justify his revolt from the Newtonian orthodoxy. And lo, the signs appeared, exactly as Einstein had predicted. Expeditions left England in 1919 for West Africa and Brazil to observe a total eclipse of the sun. And sure enough, certain stars turned out to be slightly out of their Newtonian places, just as Einstein had predicted, though for reasons concerned with the

bending of light, quite unthinkable to the common-sense mind.

The intelligent layman, though he was utterly unable to follow Einstein's reasoning, was nevertheless profoundly impressed by the fact that he, in the characteristic phrase of the Twentieth Century, had delivered the goods, or, as an earlier age might have put it, had been justified by God. But what did it all mean? There were endless attempts to dish up the Einstein theory for popular consumption—to show how very reasonable it was if you only chose to look at it in the right way. But the more they succeeded in conveying of it, the more grotesquely incredible did it seem. A mad universe, my masters—and madder than even Bedlam could have imagined! As different as possible from the right little, tight little, cosmos of the Rationalists.

Ever since the dawn of the Renaissance, the importance of Man in his Universe had been steadily declining. It was no longer a stage set for the drama of his salvation or damnation. He had become the merest accident, a transient crawler on one of the smaller satellites of a not specially important star. But if the Universe had ceased to concern itself with his nothingness, it had at least paid him the compliment of conforming to his notions of sanity. After Einstein it had ceased to do even this. It became as inconceivable as the square root of a minus quantity. Even space and time ceased to mean anything intelligible. They had become merged in a space-time continuum, whose curvature was gravity.

It was all very well for Mr. Bertrand Russell, a philosopher of the Liberal-Rationalist tradition, to end up his account of why he was not a Christian with an exhortation "to stand up and look the world frankly in the face." You might just as well talk of looking the Greek Calends in the face. There was no face, nothing on which even the mind's eye could rest for a moment, only a form of words hung on a chain of mathematical inference.



To bring home the nature of the new Universe, as revealed by Einstein, the only way was that of the Eternal in Job; to stun the minds of your audience with a bombardment of violent paradoxes. You might not be able to add a cubit to your stature, but you could add something to it by lying flat in a boat facing North-South, and then allowing it to swing round on the current to East-West. You could double the mass of anything if you could only succeed in moving it fast enough. Time might be different to a being in rapid motion from what it would be to one who stood still. Time was, in fact, as Bergson had already discovered from his very different angle of approach, nothing fixed and absolute, but *your* time, or *my* time. It was impossible to say where time ended or space began. It was impossible to retain any common-sense notion of either of them. They had both, separately or together, become like the prophet Habbakuk, "*capables de tout.*"

Nobody was at all surprised, though not everybody was convinced, when it was suggested that the same nebula might be seen in two parts of the sky simultaneously, owing to the fact of its light not only having come direct, but also having gone on in a straight line all round the Universe and come back to earth from the other side. Scarcely an eyebrow was raised when Mr. Dunne, the inventor of an aeroplane, questioned whether time was tied to progress in one direction or whether past, present and future might not be like a very much prolonged cinema reel that could at a pinch be turned backwards as well as forwards. Moreover, he claimed to have established, that in dreams the film may work either way indifferently, and may be constructed out of our memories of the future as easily as out of those of the past.

These discoveries about the relativity of space and time reinforced those about the immateriality at the basis of matter. And there was much else besides this to reinforce the conclusion that the more advanced science got, the more incredible was the universe that

it revealed. Light and energy, instead of flowing in a steady stream, turned out to be produced in a series of jerks or packets like the pop-pop-popping of a motor-bike. If you dived down into the infinitely small you found electrons, like planets, jumping gaily out of one orbit and turning up simultaneously in another without ever passing between. If you soared up to the infinitely large, you might find the whole universe running away from itself at an inconceivable speed, and behaving like a bursting soap bubble. You might take it from the scientists that these things were true, but even so it was not a truth of which the ordinary human consciousness could make sense or vision. The most that could be said about it had been said already by the Psalmist,

"Such knowledge is too wonderful and too excellent for me. I cannot attain to it."

But why should the historian interrupt the course of his narrative to record these things? What conceivable difference can the apparent position of a star or the habits of electrons make to the destinies of civilization?

Nothing immediate, certainly, except in so far as the persecution of men like Einstein would reveal the utter depths of barbarism into which once civilized nations were capable of sinking. But indirectly the importance of this new scientific orientation can hardly be over-estimated, if, as some believe, it is by spiritual influences that the course of history is determined.

For during the nineteenth century, science had come to be supported by a faith as unquestioning as had ever been devoted to God, and was assumed to be not only incurably hostile to religion, but capable of superseding it. And science, true to the spirit of the Mechanical Revolution, meant nothing less than the mechanization of the Universe and of Man. The Cosmos was a machine running down without even the divine Mechanic whom good Mr. Paley, of the *Evidences*, had seen fit to put in charge of it. And Man was a machine with no more freedom and less hope of immortality than Puffing Billy. It was not

altogether surprising that his highest good should have come to be reckoned, like that of other machines, in statistics of material production.

The extreme development of this tendency had been in the gospel of Karl Marx and Bolshevism, with its naked and unashamed Materialism, its belief in the salvation of mankind through machinery, and its fanatical hatred of every sort of religion.

But even at the moment of its triumph, its intellectual foundations were being undermined. The dialectical Materialism, that no writer or artist in Russia could deny and live, was as much out of date, by the end of the Twenties, as the crinoline or the Pelagian heresy. And yet in England a devoted band of Rationalists lingered on, valiantly repeating the shibboleths of their grandfathers, stoutly thumping the old anti-Christian tub—as quaint a survival as those one or two Catholic congregations in Highland glens whom the Reformation has not yet touched.

Meanwhile, among the adherents of physical science, the old dogmatism was becoming discredited. Free will—to the horror of free thinkers—found favour in the highest quarters, when it was discovered that even electrons were capable of behaving with apparently unqualified caprice. The immortality of the soul was no longer to be dismissed with any airy assertion about soul and brain being the same thing. Thought was proved to be capable of passing from mind to mind without physical means. Evidence was accumulating for the phenomenon of mind acting directly on matter other than that of its own body. Even the possibility of communicating with the dead had become an open, and fiercely debated, question. Nothing whatever was too fantastic to be ruled out, *a priori*, as unscientific—not even God. No gateway to ultimate truth was barred—not even those of revelation and mysticism. Science no longer set her seal on the common sense of common minds. The universe was derationalized, and if science had an answer to its riddle, it was not one that any mortal was likely to discover, or to understand if he did.

## CHAPTER II

### AN AGE OF NERVES

For Man to comprehend the Universe was after all an intellectual luxury that he could dispense with. But for Man to comprehend himself was an urgent necessity. It was only by so doing that he could find an answer to that lamentable and ancient query—"what shall I do to be saved?" a cry that was bursting from the very heart of civilization in these Post-war years, because it was evident that unless an answer could be found, and that speedily, mankind was lost indeed.

In this age of triumphant science, it was to her that men naturally turned in their perplexity. But in the sweep and hurry of her progress, it appeared that science had somehow contrived to forget Man. She had given him knowledge of his environment, and machinery to transform it, but she had left him without knowledge of his own nature or the means of adapting it to the environment he himself had revolutionized.

The science of mind had somehow failed to take part in the general progress. Psychology at the beginning of the twentieth century was governed by a gentleman's agreement to play the game with the verbal counters that had passed current for donkey's years, to dress up in modern clothes the mouldering images of Locke, Hume, and other accepted Panjandrums, and parade them round university precincts like the unburnt guys of yesteryear. In no other science would such a procedure have been tolerated for a moment.

Why then was it that psychology was allowed to remain, alone among the sciences, in this antediluvian, or, at any rate, pre-Baconian, darkness? The reason was itself psychological. Nobody cared, or cared enough to make any effective demand for a science of mind. In an age where Man's energies were concentrated, as never before, on the task of controlling his material environment, that environment became of absorbing interest; any information about it was feverishly sought after. Not for a moment would practical men have allowed a vested interest of professors to fob them off with the bogus mintage of academic convention. An out-of-date physics or chemistry would have been bad for trade; a past-century biology would have shortened life and lowered the working efficiency of the human machine. It was a matter of simple business to keep these sciences in touch with reality, but as for the soul, any second-hand guesswork would be good enough. It was not worth the trouble of checking.

It was no interest or even belief in a soul that did at last create a demand strong enough to be supplied by a new science of mind, quite unconnected with the bogus psychology of the schools. It was rather that Modern Man had become acutely and increasingly conscious of possessing what he called "nerves."

It is easy to see how inevitably the modern age came to be dominated by nerves. For the nervous system, like every other part of Man's vital make-up, has grown up in response to definite needs. It is adapted to a certain tempo of impressions from the outer world, just as a postal system is staffed to deal with a certain average amount of correspondence. From the point of view of the brain, we can talk of environment as being hurried or slow. And the nervous system took form in the comparatively leisurely environment of a pre-machine age, when the demands for mental and muscular response were fewer and less urgent than in our own. It was, by present-day standards, to an almost inconceivably

slow environment that our ancestors in wigs and perukes had to adapt themselves. The effect of the Mechanical Revolution was to transform that environment by quickening its tempo from dignified minuet, to a wild jazz, on a gramophone with the record continually accelerated and the dancers expected to go on in step, as in a non-stop competition, till they collapsed from exhaustion.

The whole significance and tragedy of the Mechanical Revolution was that it revolutionized environment without revolutionizing men. And in any case, adaptation in biology is an exceedingly long process extending over many generations. Twentieth century Man was provided with an approximately eighteenth century equipment of nerve fibre. His only chance of relieving his system of intolerable strain would be by a complete re-ordering and training of his mind—as if a post office, that could not increase its staff, except by dribblets, were to cope with increased demands by revolutionizing its system. But mind-training, or practical psychology, though more needed than any other science, was hardly thought of except as an Eldorado for quacks.

Inevitably then, as machine power multiplied and the tempo of life quickened, the nervous system proved unequal to the demands made upon it. A study of literature will show how nerves, by which we mean diseased nerves, began more and more to thrust themselves into notice. It is not by accident—or even solely by merit—that the posthumous reputation of Baudelaire and his fellow-decadents should be continually on the increase, or that such a robust muse as that of Robert Browning should have fallen into comparative oblivion.

It was at the very end of the last century that educated Europe was startled by a philippic launched by a certain Dr. Max Nordau against the whole modern spirit as reflected in its literature. The Doctor himself was an unashamed Philistine with no more sensibility than an average coalheaver, but his down-

right sincerity and his erudition in nervous pathology enabled him to convince even those who most stoutly resented his attacks on individual geniuses, that nervous degeneration was a tendency of the modern age, that had increased, was increasing, and was not likely to be diminished.

The War brought the subject of nerves into a prominence that it had never before assumed. Nothing had been more remarkable than the success of the medical and hygienic services in reducing the proportion of casualties by disease,<sup>1</sup> as compared with those by battle, to a comparatively insignificant percentage, instead of the fifty or more of previous wars. But while typhoid and dysentery and the rest of them had been successfully held at bay, an entirely new class of complaint had to be dealt with under the name of shell-shock, or nervous collapse amounting to paralysis. Even the scarlet-faced martinets who had spluttered that shell shock was shell funk, and had caused one or two victims to be callously slaughtered by their own comrades in order to encourage the rest, were forced to yield to the weight of medical testimony, and to accord a sullen recognition to "nerves" as a disease not necessarily criminal.

The "degeneration" on which Nordau had remarked in the Nineties had become a great deal more pronounced in the period of exhaustion—which was most of all nervous exhaustion—following the War. It is true that there was less self-conscious decadence than in the days of Baudelaire, or of Oscar Wilde. Then nerves had been like a new toy, or instrument of sensitive strings. Their exploitation had been the latest fashion for the advanced. Now they were becoming so universal that there was nothing chic in making a song about them. In fact, they were less likely to excite pride than furious revolt in their victims.

The tendencies of the new age were exaggerated to the point of caricature in the career and writings of D. H. Lawrence, who was—and not undeservedly—

<sup>1</sup> Except from the plague called influenza.

its most potent literary influence. Lawrence, who had started life as an elementary schoolmaster in a mining district, was not only a consumptive, but a hopeless neurotic, utterly incapable of adapting himself to the demands life made upon him. His friend and biographer, Mr. Middleton Murry, has plainly indicated that this was nowhere more marked than in the field of sex. What precisely is implied by the allusion to Lawrence's "final sexual failure", in that writer's oddly named *Son of Woman*,<sup>1</sup> is not precisely indicated, but we have Lawrence's nerve-racked outcry in a letter to his mother-in-law—"a man doesn't ask for love from his wife, but for strength, strength, strength . . . and the stupid woman keeps on saying love, love, love."<sup>2</sup>

The neurotic, God help him, can do no otherwise than demand the thing he most lacks—but one wonders what would have been the end of Browning's love affair if he had come to Elizabeth's invalid couch with a demand for "strength, strength, strength," or if after marriage, he had been addicted to chasing her round and round a table shrieking "I'll kill her! I'll kill her!" It is certain, at any rate, that this would have rendered him a more acceptable subject for the up-to-date biographer.

The comparison with Browning is only too easily supplemented with that implied in the title *Son of Woman*, for this Lawrence has drawn himself in the last of his stories, *The Man who Died*, which tells what would have happened if Christ had not only survived the Entombment, but become converted to the Lawrentian way of salvation. He is, of course, resolved to cut Himself loose from so arduous and concentrated a task as that of saving mankind, and so wanders off in all the joy of irresponsibility to the sea coast, where He encounters and has a *liaison* with the attractive and aristocratic young priestess of an Egyptian temple, until the girl's mother gets wind

<sup>1</sup> p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Not I but the Wind*, by Frieda Lawrence, p. 135.



of the affair and sends to arrest Him. But He, resolved not to be caught the same way twice, effects a smart escape in the arresting party's own boat, and vanishes in pursuit of fresh and presumably similar experiences, leaving the priestess to have her baby and settle affairs with her mother as best she can.

It is the typical Lawrence situation or—to use the correct modern phrase—wish dream. The husky, red blooded child of nature, overmastering and enjoying the lovely and—since Lawrence is an Englishman—preferably high-born female, all that Lawrence was perpetually distorting the mirror in order to see, all from which his own nerve-racked personality was inexorably barred. His works are one long portrait gallery of such noble savages—game-keepers, gipsies, Mexican grooms, almost naked caciques sacrificing quite naked ladies, Italian circus men gallivanting among troupes of performing Indians. . . .

All I could never be,  
All, men ignored in me.

He himself wandered up and down the world looking for such ideal primitives, and always disappointed by experience of the real thing. Above all, he was perpetually acting the part, to himself and others, of the bearded superman, rough and ruthless, the part that, in his heart of hearts, he knew that he could never sustain. He wanted to dominate the woman, but, still more profoundly, to take refuge with her and be soothed, *like a child on its mother's breast*. The conflict of these inconsistencies kept him in a perpetual nervous agony that burst to the surface in rages, as futile and pathetic as those of a sick child. When his insatiable demand for "strength, strength, strength" from his human environment failed to obtain satisfaction, his dearest friends would become obscene bugs—to quote one typical outburst—sucking his life away.

In all the literature of unconscious humour, surely the rarest gem is provided by Lawrence's scream of

poetic indignation against a lady who has been tactless enough to admire his "good strong thighs . . . rough and hairy," without being duly terrified at the spectacle. Weasels, adders, and bulls, she is reminded, are just as beautiful as Lawrence's legs—therefore :

Is there nothing in me to make you hesitate ?

I tell you there is all these,

And why should you overlook them in me ?

In his sore need for strength and soothing, Lawrence must have resort not only to primitive natures but to primitive cults. The sun is invoked, in a prose rhapsody surpassed by nothing of its kind in the language, to stream down blood vitality, and above all the moon, to "caress our nerves, smooth them with the silky hand of her glowing . . . soothe and heal us like a great cool Artemis between her arms."<sup>1</sup> The Universe is, in fact, an immense nerve-hospital, with the luminaries as healers.

The fact of his being neurotic does not prevent Lawrence from being one of the greatest, and perhaps the greatest of English writers during the second and third decades of the century. It is the very fact of his being so supremely neurotic that makes him capable of giving verbal form to the spirit of his time. If he had had nerves like Browning's he might have lived to a ripe old age teaching the three R.s to the children of pitmen, or even have been a pitman himself, with a normal sex life and a brood of healthy children. Only the world would have been the loser for it.

It is not surprising, then, that we find Lawrence among the first men of letters to be captured by the new technique of practical psychology, with its accompanying doctrine, that had already been worked out in Vienna before the War, but which only attained its European vogue in the years immediately following it. It is true that psycho-analysis, in Lawrence's hands, included a good deal that had its origin not in Vienna, but in Hindustan, about a "profound and

<sup>1</sup> *Apocalypse*, pp. 47-50.

pristine consciousness" centred somewhere behind the stomach, and of a corresponding sympathetic centre in the breast, with vibrations and polarities imported from electrical science. Lawrence, being a creative artist, was a more attractive, though less systematic apostle of the new doctrine, than the high, Viennese fathers. But in the great fundamental principle he was at one with them, to wit, that Mankind is to be regarded from the angle of the healer—the nerve healer.

For this is exactly what psycho-analysis meant. Its founders were nerve specialists who had derived their experience from the neurotic patients, mostly women, who had had the money and leisure to bring their ailments to their consulting rooms. And they generalized from the results of this experience to the whole human race, with a recklessness amazing in professed men of science. Nothing was too fantastic to pass muster as evidence. Even the accounts given, under cross questioning, by patients of their dreams, and the answers on the most delicate subjects extracted by prurient parents from tiny children, were fish to the net of the psycho-analyst. The result was an accumulation of dogma, that varied according to the particular orthodoxy it represented, but all of which was certified and accepted as bearing the imprint of science.<sup>1</sup>

The keystone of this dogma, in all its versions, was belief in what was christened the *Œdipus complex*. This was a desire, implanted in infancy and persisting subconsciously throughout life, of the male human being to murder his father in order to rape his mother. Sometimes this was supposed to be matched by a complementary *Electra complex* of the female, with the parental rôles reversed, but sometimes she was roped in for a full-blooded *Œdipus* by the simple explanation—supposed to be the first thing that would occur to any small girl—that her most obvious

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller treatment of this subject, may I be permitted to refer the reader to my *New Minds for Old*, Book III, Chapter I?

physical difference from her father was to be accounted for by paternal amputation. There were other even less savoury complexes, about which it is hardly possible to read without feeling sick. But when psycho-analysis passed out of the consulting room and became an intellectual fashion, it was with the Oedipus complex that it was most prominently identified. That explanation was held accountable for almost everything that human beings ever were or did. It passed for as much a part of scientific truth as Ohm's Law in electricity or the cell theory in biology. And it was supposed to be capable of so many transformations, displacements, transferences, and sublimations, that nothing that ever happened or ever could happen could be proved guiltless of it.

But of course, when you are dealing with neurotics, mental kinks as grotesque even as this famous complex are of by no means improbable occurrence, in practical earnest.

It was, in fact, the subconscious assumption on which the whole doctrine of psycho-analysis, particularly as formulated by its arch-interpreter, Dr. Sigmund Freud, was based, that men might be regarded as patients, whose neurosis could only be cured by those few doctors who had, in some inexplicable manner, managed to escape it. Freud's picture of the world was one of nervous disease so widespread that it was safe to regard any human being as a creature without the power of self-determination, morbidly dominated by the sex instinct, and the victim of all sorts of diseased complexes so deeply embedded in his subconscious self that it was only by a long and complicated technique of analysis that they could be brought to the light of day.

As a method of healing, psycho-analysis never became much more than a medical fad. It was far too expensive a luxury to become fashionable except among those very few people, after the War, who had money to throw away. A few specialists did indeed manage to rake in easy guineas, by sympathetic-

ally extracting their most salacious contents from the minds of hysterical women, and informing them that they had *Cedipuses* to be sublimated—this being, in polite circles, a more popular form of complex than the anal variety. Of the black-coated middle class, few could afford to be analysed, and fewer still of the manual workers had ever heard of it at all.

But though its direct effects as a technique may have been insignificant, it is hardly possible to over-rate the influence of this new psychology in the Post-war years. It was wonderfully adapted to the spirit of the time. For now, as never before, its assumption of a society gone neurotic had some plausibility. Complexes had been rampant during the War, and even during the Peace everybody was feeling more or less shell-shocked, and conscious, if at all introspective, of a certain lack of control over the dark forces of his subconscious personality. Psycho-analysis did at least offer some sort of an explanation of these things, one that was not to be found beneath the dusty cobwebs of academic psychology.

Freud's idea, for instance, which is the same as Lawrence's, that everything human is dominated—if you only look into it closely enough—by the sex motive, was brightly acceptable to a generation to which love, reduced to its lowest common measure of carnal affection, seemed almost the only passion worth bothering about, and certainly the only one capable of inspiring marketable literature. And the *Cedipus* motive did seem the very thing to account for the increasing disharmony between parents and children that accompanied the weakening of the family tie.

In a surprisingly short time, the new craze had captured whatever there was of an intelligentsia in England. It was impossible to be advanced without being to a certain extent psycho-analytic. Raise the stone and you should find *Cedipus* cleave the wood and there was he! No up-to-date biography or work of fiction could get on without him. The younger

intelligentsia discovered that it had got complexes, and talked of them with a superb absence of restraint. But then it had also discovered that any sort of inhibition, or self-control, was definitely unscientific.

This, like all other crazes, was bound to exhaust itself by its very extravagance. The revelation of Freud was no more calculated than that of Marx to turn Englishmen into Fundamentalists. And when, eventually, it had been agreed by all but a rump of devotees, to take the dogmas of the new cult with the largest possible pinch of salt, it became possible to estimate its effects, and the progress it had undoubtedly—though indirectly—stimulated.

It had cleared the air. The psychology of the doctors was at least a welcome change from that of the dons, and it was a relief to be able to study the workings of the mind without bothering about Locke or any other panjandrum before Freud.

It had fertilized thought to a degree that became all the more noticeable when the crotchets and jargon of its founders had begun to fade out of popular vogue. It had brought psychology out of the Common Room into the market place. It had created, even if it had failed to satisfy, a demand for a science of mind co-equal in honour and efficiency with that of body. It had, in fact, called attention to the most crying need of the age—that of bringing mental abreast of material progress, of adapting mind to environment.

Its habit of treating the whole world as a monstrously enlarged nerve-doctor's clinic, had at least the effect of directing attention to the overstraining of the nervous system that was one of the most ominous effects of the Mechanical Revolution, and to the increasing power of all sorts of subconscious habits or complexes over the personality—not only the Œdipus, but the far more potent and widespread inferiority complex, by which whole nations might be stampeded into suicide. The great gift of psycho-analysis to modern Man was, in fact, to make him conscious of his subconsciousness.

## CHAPTER III

### ECCE HOMUNCULUS

The picture drawn by the psycho-analysts was not flattering to human nature. *Homo sapiens* was reduced to *Homunculus neuroticus*, or to the likeness of a house built over its own cesspools, whose stinks and sewer gases pervaded all the living-rooms. Freud himself went beyond even the Rationalists in degrading God's image, for he not only denied to Man soul, freedom, and immortality, but he whittled down to a minimum discourse of reason. Most that was thought and done by men would seem to be the product of an incredibly foul and foolish subconsciousness. There were no gods but nerve specialists; the rest of mankind were their patients.

But if Man was no more than a patient to the psycho-analysts, he was a patient whose healing was the paramount object of their technique. His neurosis might be sublimated—even spiritualized. There was no inherent necessity for psycho-analysis to be bound up with such stark Materialism as that of its founder. In other hands than those of Freud it became a technique, like that of so much organized religion, for the cure of sick souls. And the doctor, even if he takes an uncomplimentary view of his patient, does at least, if he is worth his salt, make his patient's welfare the paramount consideration.

There was a lower deep than that of psycho-analysis to be plumbed by a still more up-to-date psychology. For in a Machine Age, Man is no longer valued, as in Christian or Liberal scales, for his own sake. Whether

or not he possesses a soul is a matter of indifference. Like a machine, he exists to be exploited; his worth is precisely what can be got out of him. In the early days of the Mechanical Revolution, far more care was devoted to the machines than to the hands that tended them. Workers in the factories were used up and killed off like the slaves in the old *ergastula*. The tendency of industrial progress has been to redress the balance, and to devote as much care to human as to mechanical plant, except in the fighting services, always the last strongholds of reaction, whose human units, or "heroes", were squandered with as callous a prodigality in the early Twentieth as "hands" in the early Nineteenth Century. In machine-powered journalism and advertising the technique is one of mental and emotional exploitation in which soul, and all that it implies, has ceased to count, and sales are all in all. And finally, the new political technique of the Fascibolshevist despotism is founded on the assumption that he who disposes of the machinery of State can dictate not only the actions, but the thoughts and passions of all its component units.

The newest psychology was the inevitable product of this state of things. It proposed to simplify matters by cutting out not only soul, but also personality. Man was henceforth to be regarded in no other light than that of *so much environment*, to be brought under the operator's control and exploited for whatever it could be made to yield. From such a standpoint, the very idea of soul or personality became meaningless. You do not bother about these things in a machine—why therefore in a man?

It was, significantly enough, in ultra-Capitalist America and ultra-Communist Russia, that this philosophy of human nature was most gladly accepted. In America it was dignified by the uncouth title of *Behaviourism*, and consisted in a flat refusal to recognize personality, thought, consciousness, or anything whatever pertaining to a man's mind, except that which another man's senses actually received—



his behaviour or response to stimulus. Your neighbour was an automatic machine to which you applied certain stimuli to produce certain results. And it was your whole duty, or rather your whole interest, towards your neighbour, to apply the stimuli with such scientific accuracy as to obtain the result you wanted. To make this theory logically watertight, the whole influence of heredity had to be brazenly denied, and all infants, white and black, sons of geniuses and sons of cretins,—and why not also those of chimpanzees?—were supposed to start on a footing of absolute equality, like so many stimulus-response machines standardized to one pattern. This, too, in the name of science!

It is not surprising that those who thought so ignobly of their species, should have experimented on those specimens that came into their power, with no more respect than they would have showed to so much machinery. Behaviourist experts complacently recorded their experiments in "conditioning" children by deliberately creating associations of terror with dogs, or other selected bugbears, in order, if possible, to unfrighten them afterwards. The effects on the victim's nerves in later life might be neglected for purposes of the experiment.

The same sort of work had been carried out, not on children, but dogs, by a certain Professor Pavlov, in Russia, experiments whose service to the cause of universal mechanization was so apparent to the Fathers of the Red Inquisition, that their author was not only allowed to live, but encouraged to work, in spite of his unconcealed disloyalty to Bolshevism. Pavlov's discovery was that it was possible to "condition" the responses of dogs to a greater extent than the ordinary layman would have imagined possible; though any expert trainer could probably have produced much more startling results. But Pavlov was scientific—that is to say, he not only discovered that a dog's mouth watered when you gave him a plate of meat, but actually contrived to measure the

amount of the saliva, and of its diminution each day when you teased the dog by giving him the plate without the dinner.

And these wonderful wonders of wonders elicited from dogs and children were trumpeted through the world as if they were equal in importance with the discoveries of Darwin and Newton, and as if they certified the good tidings that Man, being finally despiritualized and depersonalized, could henceforth be regarded as on a par, no longer even with the beasts that perish, but with the machines that are scrapped.

Certainly in no previous age would anybody have dreamed of deducing such tremendous conclusions from such trivial premises. The Behaviourists and their children, Pavlov and his dogs, might have aroused a certain mild interest among specialists, to compensate for a more widespread repulsion and ridicule; but only among a generation desperately anxious for its own degradation to one dead level of mechanized uniformity would any wider significance have been forced upon them.

One asks, is such a state of mind conceivable? Can men, in the mass, really be got to will the loss of their human, not to speak of their divine, birthright? Unfortunately, experience—and particularly that of our own age—shows that this is as natural as gravity. It is always the tendency to sink; it is always an effort to rise:

He only earns his freedom and existence  
Who daily conquers them anew.

What was the meaning of that urge for "normalcy" that was so widespread after the War, if not that the effort of striving after ideals of any kind had proved too exhausting for war-jaded nerves, and that the average man had no longer any desire but to be left alone, to tread the trivial round of an average existence? There was a refrain, popular in Imperialist circles, but susceptible of wider and deeper application:

God grant our greatness may not fail  
From craven fears of being great.

During the aftermath of the War, it seemed as if men were not only afraid, or rather too exhausted, to be great, but as if the very idea of greatness, even as a possibility, were repellent to them.

This tendency had been at work long before, and it was only what was to be expected from an age that concentrated its whole energies on improving its machinery, and thought nothing of improving its men. It was the result, also, of a philosophy of life that had never ceased, for centuries, to belittle the importance of the human soul in the scheme of things. The twilight of the gods had come upon the earth, and with it the reign of that Last Man of Nietzsche's vision who hoppeth about on the earth making everything small.

The War had brought this Last Man or Little Man into his kingdom. Even the comparatively petty struggles of the past, when the combatants had been numbered by the thousand instead of the million, had been more fruitful of outstanding personality. Even in the higher ranks and supreme commands the utmost that could be attained was a reasonable standard of professional, but pedestrian, competence, that of a Rawlinson, a Petain, a Ludendorff. But there was no Man of Destiny or Corporal John or Great Frederick; no Nelson touch; no man to start a cult like that of the Nikkal Seyn in the Punjab—unless we are to take the solitary and significant instance of Lawrence of Arabia, a man for whom there was found no place in the Post-war world. Men were driven in herds to the shambles, floundering through mud under their equipment, to be exterminated by machinery far less cleanly and humanely than beasts in the Chicago meat factories. If the legend of the factory for boiling their bones and fat into serviceable products were a lie, it was at least an inspired lie. It was the spirit not only of the War but of the age, a thing about which no Behaviourist philosopher or Marxian Materialist could consistently feel the least squeamishness. It

was what one did with the scrap iron of worn-out machinery.

The word hero had ceased to have any meaning, when it was applied equally to anyone who volunteered or was made to get into a uniform. And it was by a true instinct that the most honoured monument in each country was not that to any leader, but to the unknown—and unknowable—soldier.

After the War there was no more talk of heroes, except in bitter irony. Even the cult of the superman, sponsored in England by Mr. Bernard Shaw, had faded almost out of memory. The Little Man was swarming everywhere, triumphant and unashamed. The cinema, the press, the hustings, were devoted to the cult and exploitation of this unknown civilian, the man of the herd, the cell in the social body. The most popular comedian of the time, to whose saga magazines were devoted abroad, was Mr. Charles Chaplin, the insignificant victim of every sort of misadventure, the shuttlecock of destiny, who yet was allowed to blunder through to the happy conclusion that his audience, who identified themselves with him, desired to see. He was endowed with the Little Man's one virtue, a certain humorous acceptance of his littleness, a capacity for extracting fun from his own tragedy. It had been the essence of Tommy humour during the War—the real humour of the ranks, that of the "marching, marching, always bloody well marching" order.

The most powerful levelling agency of Post-war England was that of the Press, especially that of the millionaire-controlled trusts. It was by this means more than any other that the mind was standardized, or, in the phrase of the new psychology, conditioned, to one dead level of suggestibility. It was in these papers that the Smallest Man was most frankly catered for. Tough old John Bull was replaced, in the symbolism of their cartoonists, by a typical figure, with whom the reader is obviously expected to identify himself, and whose whole point is his insignificance.

He is drawn, with horrid verisimilitude, to represent a villa dweller in some suburb on the lower edge of gentility—one suspects him of being a clerk in a city firm, or perhaps in a small way of business himself—a cunning, greedy, ignoble little bounder, incapable of any generous sentiment, and chiefly engaged in cheering on the policy imposed on the paper by the reigning Baron, or grumbling at his rates and taxes. The Little Man, with his little mind and microscopic soul!

Even the Labour Press must have its own Little Man, sufficiently described by his name—Henry Dubb.

No doubt the Little Man has been with us from the dawn of history, but it was not until the twentieth century that he was chosen as the ideal representative of his species, solely on account of his littleness.

Along with the worship of littleness went an almost fanatical hatred of greatness, either of soul or of intellect. The Little Man delighted to honour anyone who could drive a machine faster or further than it had been driven before; he would wax quite hysterical about his favourite cinema performers—but that was because he regarded them, not altogether unreasonably, as being mentally and spiritually on his own level. But a word had been coined in America, and gladly adopted in England, to express the hostility aroused by any suspicion of mental superiority. This word was "Highbrow", and though it may possibly have been connected, in the first place, with the act of raising the eyebrows, in the minds of nine out of ten people who used it, it implied the high forehead of the thinker. It was taken for granted that people who answered to this description were altogether inferior to those who could boast of low brows, like cretins and chimpanzees.

So faithfully does literature provide expression for the spirit of its time, that the Little Man had his champions even in its highest ranks. The Lilliputian drive was well under way at the breaking of the peace, and its doughtiest champion was one of the

few men of letters who dominated equally the Pre-war and Post-war scenes.

This was Mr. H. G. Wells, whom nature had marked out for greatness, but who, like a Brobdingnagian turned traitor, not only espoused the cause of the Little People, but even sought to be accepted in his own person as the supremely representative Little Man, whose career was a triumphant proof of what an energetic littleness could achieve, little by little. It is the downright sincerity with which he holds to this idea that makes Mr. Wells's autobiography one of the most engaging ever written, a more thorough-going confession by far than that of Rousseau, who would never have had the courage to brand himself with a second-rate, or journalese, mind. And yet by virtue of this very sincerity, the faster Mr. Wells flees from his greatness, the more inexorably it pursues him. The Brobdingnagian can turn his coat, but he cannot reduce his stature by a single cubit.

Mr. Wells was a far more consistent Leveller than those Jacobins of the Terror, who, while they guillotined aristocrats, called themselves Brutus and Timoleon. He was frankly convinced that greatness and heroism of every description were sheer humbug, and always had been. The sight of the tall poppies in the garden was an offence to him, and he could never be happy till he had flicked off all their heads, one after the other. The spectacle of a King, or a Lady Bountiful, or a person of any recognized importance, was as painful to his eye as a smut from a railway engine—he could never be happy while it was there. The mere idea of a classical education, that the Little Man had not been able to get, infuriated him. Classical dons were uncouth and ugly; the Athenians themselves an absurdly overrated and rather contemptible people. It was humbug—humbug—humbug—to say that these guys with expensive educations had any advantage whatever over the self-made board-schooler or escaped shop assistant.

After the War, Mr. Wells put his principles to the

a few months before the end of the War. It comprised short biographies of four leading Victorians—if we are to include Arnold of Rugby under this designation—and the scope of its author's ambition was defined in the preface, itself a little masterpiece of exposition:

"We have never had, like the French, a great biographical tradition; we have had no Fontenelles and Condorcets, with their incomparable *éloges*, compressing into a few shining pages the manifold existences of men."

That was the form of Strachey's ideal, a form so consummately achieved that it is safe to predict that these essays will remain stylistic models of their kind so long as the craft of letters is held in honour. But what of their spirit? That is best revealed in a letter of ardent congratulation that Strachey received from Sir Walter Raleigh, one of those literary Panjandrums whom the Pre-war generation delighted to honour. He wrote—"I have read only *Flo* and *Tom*. (It is you who have made me so familiar.)"<sup>1</sup>

That just hits it off. It was exquisitely delightful for the Little Man to find Arnold of Rugby and the Lady with the Lamp brought down to his own familiar level as absurd *Tom* and cantankerous *Flo*; to make the discovery that he was as good as they were, or rather, that they were no better than he was.

And so he yielded, as well he might, to Strachey's word-magic, and accepted the substance of his message with a credulity untempered by criticism. It never occurred to him that what might be above praise as literature might be beneath contempt as history; that Strachey's essay on Cardinal Manning only differed in style from the No Popery propaganda of Liverpool and Belfast, even down to the innuendo about a deceased Pontiff's location lurking in the words, "Monsignor Talbot was at Passy, and Pio Nono was—where?"; that the sole point of the prolonged sneer at Thomas Arnold was that the Doctor had been un-

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, p. 479.

ashamedly in earnest, and that earnestness had gone out of fashion among Strachey's contemporaries; that Florence Nightingale was branded as a shrew and a tigress, because womanly pity moved her to espouse the cause of the poor soldiers in her charge, not only with tireless practicality, but with righteous indignation, because, in short, she was a heroine to be worshipped, and not the bread and butter miss of Victorian fiction.

Finally there was General Gordon, a Christian hero, and, as such, an obvious case for debunking. Here Strachey felt it safe, or necessary, to go beyond innuendo to naked invention. He plainly implied that Gordon was a drunkard, and this discovery, for which there was not a tittle of colourable evidence, was re-echoed from every housetop in Fleet Street, and passed unchallenged for years. The Little Man felt that the world had become comfortable at last. He might stand on tiptoe in the crowd, and his view would not be impeded, even though one rose from the dead.

The immense success of Strachey's book suggested that there was safe money to be made, by anyone capable of putting pen to paper and borrowing a few volumes from a library, out of debunking the reputation of any recognized celebrity. Only it was not called debunking; it was called humanizing. To humanize a hero was to bring him down to the level of the Little Man, to strip off the lion's skin and turn him loose in the herd with his fellow asses. It was part of this technique to ignore the hero's distinctive achievement, and write about the Man, the human unit in whom the greatest possible number of readers would recognize a homunculus and a brother. Above all, the biographer must endow the Man with a sex life, the more highly spiced the better. If Wellington can be caught out in some elderly lechery, or Dickens in an intrigue with an actress, that is of infinitely greater importance, from the modern biographer's standpoint, than the strategy of Water-



loo, which he cannot be expected to understand, or the genius of writings with which he may have only a skimming acquaintance.

To the new school of biography the vogue of psycho-analysis was a godsend. The insertion of an *Oedipus complex* into the career of any deceased celebrity became a matter of routine. And a smattering of the Viennese terminology would make it easy to cloak any sort of solemn bawdry with the respectability of science.

The one person safe from debunking was the biographer himself, unless, indeed, like one aspiring gentleman, who outdid Strachey's creation of a *Bacchanal Gordon* by one of a *Priapic Gladstone*, he pitches on a celebrity with relations still living and capable of bringing a humanizer to book. But apart from such accidents, there was no one who had the least interest in exposing the ramp, neither the reviewer, who was probably in the business himself, nor the public, which was getting exactly what it wanted for its money. So the revolution in biography was everywhere proclaimed as if the art had never been known before Strachey's advent, and a perfect spate of lives flooded the market each Spring and Autumn season. The whole of the past could not produce enough celebrities to go round—biographers converged like vultures on every remotely debunkable or humanizable victim. The fashions were continually changing. Among the earliest were Blake and Disraeli; there was at one time a boom in *Henry VIII*—not the majestic lord but the crowned Bluebeard; Elizabeth and both the Charleses had their little day and ceased to be.

Amid what must have been literally thousands of lives after the new model, only the most exiguous minority had a life of their own calculated to outlast one publishing season. It was easy to dip the shaft in venom, but there was no one who could bend the bow of Lytton Strachey. Such biographies as those of Mr. Harold Nicolson, who had enough taste and

knowledge to appreciate poets for their poetry and statesmen for their statesmanship, were exceptions as rare as they are permanently refreshing. And such *jeux d'esprit* as Mr. Philip Guedalla's Palmerston Rag and Wellington Jazz will always have a certain interest for students of the Post-war mentality. But the real significance of the new biography is not in what it achieved, but in what it aimed at, namely the reduction of all greatness to one common level of "humanized" mediocrity—the level of the Little Man.

It was not enough that God's image should be dethroned. The process of degradation could only be completed if it were rolled in the mud out of which it had arisen, and in the even fouler mud of its own depositing. This was the especial task of another man of genius, Mr. James Joyce, whose masterpiece, *Ulysses*, had been on the stocks since the first year of the War, but was not published till 1922, and even then could only be got into England—a matter of absolute necessity for anyone who wanted to be *au fait* with contemporary literature—by smuggling it through the customs. It was the novel of one day in a man's life, and those who have waded through the whole of its 732 pages are probably as small and heroic a band as those who have performed a similar feat with Marx on Capital. For all but a very few of the elect it was one of the most indigestible books in the whole of literature—but it was also among the most influential.

Only, perhaps, in twentieth-century Dublin, could there have been so cold and sneering a lucidity of disillusionment. We have touched rock bottom—beneath this deep there can be no lower. Here is the Smallest Man stripped bone naked, exposed in all his squalor, his meanness, his filth. And not Man only—for all records of loathsomeness are eclipsed by the long monologue with which the book closes, supposed to be the thoughts of a woman in bed. As writing it is superb. Even though you hate it, it forces upon you a conviction of its reality. It is

possible, you feel, for modern life to produce souls as dead and festering with corruption as this one of Marion Bloom.<sup>1</sup> And if that is granted the debunking of human nature is complete. It is only a question of whether to write *finis* or *resurgam*.

<sup>1</sup> Equated by the faithful with Homer's Penelope.

## CHAPTER IV

### CULTURE AGAINST LIFE

Ever since the War a strange and deadly process has been at work. It is nothing less than the progressive extinction, people by people, of the very possibility of civilized culture, a creeping paralysis of genius spreading from East to West. At the close of the War, the only one of the new tyrannies in being was that of Socialist Soviet Russia, and there it was proposed to set up a new Proletarian culture more wonderful and advanced than anything of the past, with orchestras of factory hooters and statues of Karl Marx in every stage of symbolic dehumanization. But it soon became apparent that the Soviet muse was doomed to be a slave and a prostitute, and Soviet literature the work of wretched hacks whose sole function was to act as propagandists for the established faith. The same sort of extinguisher was destined to fall on the cultures of Central and Southern Europe. Even Italy—and finally Germany—made the great surrender. Art was in chains; thought was gagged. The level flood of barbarism had submerged every eminence, and no ark floated on the waters.

Was England destined to fall in her turn and give up her soul? In former days it had been the fashion to sneer at her as lacking in culture, barren of ideas. But now it seemed as if she might be destined to become the last bulwark of European civilization, the last home of the freedom that is the breath of thought and life-blood of genius. For the tradition of freedom was implanted in her soul as it never had been in those of Russia and Italy. No tyrant, Fascist

or Communist, would find it easy to make her his footstool.

But even assuming that she was able to preserve intact her free institutions and the right of every man to create as the spirit moved him, it had yet to be seen whether she would be capable of evolving a culture worthy to supply the place of those that had fallen, and to hold up a lamp for civilization that would shine ever more brightly as the night around deepened.

We have seen something of the real danger—more subtle than that of the open and brutal violence of coloured shirts. What we have spoken of as the dominance of the Little Man might develop the effects of tyranny, without the form. It is possible to starve a culture no less than to crush it. Artists are not chameleons to feed on light and air, and being sensitive creatures, they do not thrive when starved of appreciation. The Little Man has no use for genius or its products—in the depths of his little soul he hates and distrusts them. And when he has the numbers and resources to permit him to arbitrate on the elegancies, he will carefully eliminate anything calculated to disturb his complacency, or compel him to the labour of unaccustomed thought.

In a healthy state of society, there is no division between art and life. The one expresses the other. The maker, the man of creative art or letters, does but clothe the genius of his time and people with form. He is, in a sense, their supremely representative man; the England of the late Elizabethans is Shakespeare's England; the Florence of the quattrocento speaks to us from the canvases of her masters. But during the nineteenth century, a new conception of art had been gaining ground. In a mechanized civilization neither the environment nor the spirit of life were deemed capable of artistic expression. The only salvation for the maker is thus to retire into a world of his own, a cloistral seclusion, where he can escape from the dominance of the all-conquering Little Man, and cultivate his art according to its own

specialized technique. As a choice of evils, this may be deemed the lesser, but to separate art from life is to cut it off from the prime source of its vitality—to condemn it to spiritual anæmia. The time is indeed out of joint when the muse, like the Victorian convict, is put to the task of grinding wind, and culture is divorced from the soil.

The withdrawal of imaginative genius from life was changed, by the War, into a flight. It was only in the very early stages that the will to victory was deemed capable of such artistic expression as Rupert Brooke's sonnets, and Julian Grenfell's one immortal lyric. Long before the end of the struggle, the only creative reaction was such scorn and disgust as that of Mr. Siegfried Sassoon, or such heartbroken pity as that of Wilfred Owen. Writers and artists alike, their attitude to the War, as far as their work was warmed by the least spark of genius, would have been summed up in that word of Cambronne's, at the conclusion of the Napoleonic epic—*Merde !*

This attitude survived the War, and, at any rate in the year immediately following it, became that of every creative artist, recognized as such by his fellows, towards the life around him. No more was it possible to combine two allegiances—those who catered for the Little Man were blackballed from the company of the highbrows. The cultured and the vulgar were divided by an impassable gulf, and the venom and intolerance of the elect surpassed that of the Philistines. To be popular—even to be understandable of the people—was to be damned.

This was most conspicuously of all the case in the sphere of poetry. Here, right up to the time of the War, the idea had survived that it was possible for the poet to fulfil his ancient function of bard, to give his audience some part of his own inspiration and sing, not only in their ears, but in their hearts. This had certainly been the ideal of Tennyson, and whatever else may be said of Mr. Kipling's poems, their importance as an historical factor is not to be gain-

said. In the years immediately preceding the War, Chaucer's art of telling stories in verse was revived by Mr. Masfield, and a literary enthusiast, Mr. Edward Marsh, conceived the idea of popularizing a new golden, or silver age, by skimming its cream in periodical anthologies of Georgian Poetry. The first of these, the only one to appear before the outbreak of War, was a resounding success, and reached a public that would never have dreamed of throwing away money on the works of individual poets. The series went on through and beyond the War; to be included in it had become equivalent in many people's minds to being picked for a sort of poetic first eleven, so that poor Mr. Marsh had a dictatorship thrust upon him that he disclaimed, but that earned him the honour of becoming as obnoxious to Mr. Wells's mediocrity complex as Napoleon, Goethe or Queen Victoria.

But the Georgians, in the very vanguard of æsthetic progress before the War, emerged from it with the reputation of conservative reactionaries—not to say back numbers. Their real and unforgiveable offence, though it was never explicitly charged against them, was that they directed their appeal to a public presumed to be of like passions with themselves; that they condescended to the common emotions of common man—or indeed to any emotion at all, apart from the joy of the craftsman in the successful handling of his material.

After the War, the impetus had gone out of the Georgian movement. The interval between the anthologies lengthened, after 1920, from two years to three, and the 1923 volume was the last, though it included the *Proem* of the youthful Peter Quennell, a lyric that must surely rank among the purest gems, of its kind, in the language.

Mr. Marsh's reign was over, and though two of the most distinguished Georgians, Mr. (afterwards Sir John) Squire and Mr. Shanks, carried on the tradition in *The London Mercury*, there was nothing that could be called a Georgian movement. In fact the very

term Georgian became one of abuse, applied to any writer who refused to go the whole way with the Bolsheviks of the new æstheticism. Something more than abuse, if we are to judge by so formidable a Left Wing manifesto as *The Georgiad* of Mr. Roy Campbell, published in 1931, a not altogether unsuccessful attempt to recapture the style of Pope's *Dunciad*, bristling with references to such unlooked-for accompaniments of poetic Menshevism as cuckoldry, homosexuality, faded beauty, and feminine moustaches, the satirist himself appearing in the rôle of David collecting the foreskins of Philistines. There was a genuine, almost a holy indignation at the back of this. The real charge against the Georgians was one of treason—that they had prostituted their mystery to the service and standards of the uninitiated.

In 1916 appeared the first of a series of annual anthologies entitled *Wheels*, that formed a sort of left wing counterblast to Georgianity, or perhaps one might say a poetic Salon of the Rejected. These came to an end two years before the Georgian anthologies, but they had, by that time, succeeded in putting the older movement as definitely out of the advanced fashion as the poetry of Tennyson. This was due, in the first instance, not so much to the quality of the poems, as to the personality of the editor, Miss Edith Sitwell, or rather to the combined personality of herself and her brothers, Osbert and Sacheverell. The result of *Wheels* was to establish in the mind of the man in the street the impression that so far as poetry counted for anything, in the nineteen-twenties, it was that of the Sitwells, whoever they might be and whatever they might have written.

Such focusing of the limelight is in itself no mean achievement, and not even those who fail to appreciate the poetic genius of the family have dared deny its flair for publicity. The two are not necessarily incompatible. Mr. Shaw, Whistler, Wilde and Byron, were masters in the art of compelling attention, not



only for their works, but their personalities. And, for that matter, the procedure of the Prophet Isaiah, in going about the streets of Zion without his customary loincloth, would have passed for rather too daring a publicity stunt even in modern Chicago.

It was something that poetry should be honoured in the Sitwells, when it had fallen into greater contempt and neglect than at any time since the invention of printing. After the petering out of the rival anthologies, it became a drug on the literary market. It is true that odd spaces of the acrostic pages of Sunday newspapers might yet be filled with some modest Bard's discovery that the rose was red and the violet blue, and now and then a poet of established reputation might find a publisher for a collected and, perhaps final, edition of his works, but for the most part even these ancient lights burnt dim and guttered out like candles in a vacuum. The Georgians did not survive their anthology, except for Miss Sackville West's striking attempt to do for the English countryside what Vergil had done for that of his own Italy. Few publishers would touch poetry, except those who specialized in the commissions of young ladies and gentlemen who could afford to pay through the nose for the rapture of seeing themselves in print—of a sort.

If you wanted to find out what was being done by the only poets whose work counted among the initiated, you had to consult the pages of periodicals that were almost as difficult to come by, for the ordinary man, as collections of improper limericks—and certainly much less sought after. It was only in the ensuing decade that the first glimmerings of a revived interest in poetry began to be manifest.

It was therefore a matter of no small importance that the Sitwells should have succeeded, by whatever means, in securing honour for poetry, and for themselves as poets, outside the exiguous cliques that alone interested themselves in any other new verse worth taking seriously. It is improbable that one in

ten of those who paid them lip homage as leaders of poetic fashion, could have told you much more about them or their work, than that they had given a recital through masks, and that they had put the fear of God into their reviewers. The Sitwells might achieve fame for their verse, but never popularity. And one might add that even while they sought the one, they scorned the other. They would never—not even if they could—have stirred the deepest emotions of all sorts and conditions of men, as Homer had done, or Milton,<sup>1</sup> or Burns.

For them, the value of poetry was determined, not by the inspiration, if any, but by the technique. "One of the most urgent needs of our time," says Miss Sitwell, in an admirably clear exposition of her æsthetic philosophy, "is that there should be a fresh apprehension of the importance of technique. Poetry is primarily an art, and not a dumping ground for the emotions."<sup>2</sup> Much of Miss Sitwell's own poetry, and perhaps the cream of it, consists deliberately of nonsense verses, not the hearty and spontaneous nonsense of Edward Lear, but very charming, very intricate, and entirely sophisticated word patterns, such delicate fancies as that about Sir Beelzebub roaring for his rum in a hotel in Hell, with the lava like Balaclava coming through the roof, the blue gendarmerie of the sea taking it in charge, and Lord Tennyson hovering somewhere in the background surrounded by temperance workers.

The form, in fact, was everything, and the content a matter of comparative indifference. Poetry may thus resolve itself into the art of saying nothing in particular, provided you say it very well. It is no caprice that induces Miss Sitwell to pay homage, that is hardly this side idolatry, to such exquisite trifling as that of Pope's *Rape of the Lock*. The Sitwells, in fact, gravitated naturally towards the baroque and

<sup>1</sup> His *Sonnet on the Late Massacre in Piedmont* aroused a national indignation that had not unimportant consequences.

<sup>2</sup> *Poetry and Criticism*, p. 26.

still more the rococo, a culture of formality without depth, of intricacy without warmth, whose charm they not only revealed, but to some extent created anew in their own works.

But, and this is after all the main point—their art is one deliberately withdrawn from life, an escape *into a dream world as unlike as possible to anything in the modern age*. Even the sham castles and oriental pavilions of the eighteenth century had a certain basis in reality; they were the trifling of a class that did, before the French Revolution, command something like a monopoly, not only of power, but of civilization. The art of the Sitwells was founded on nothing more substantial *than the dream of a predeceased artificer*. It might be a marvel of technique, but if the breath of life, the inspiration, was lacking, what profited it? Unless indeed it be the supreme task of a poet to trifle exquisitely.

Not that this was the goal which the Sitwells aimed at. They had set out with the idea not of reaction *but of revolution*. They had grasped the vital truth that the mind and spirit of man, and consequently his art forms, must be adapted to the changed conditions of the time. But the lack of vital contact tended not so much to adaptation as to preciousity. Miss Sitwell could not only make light creak in verse, but explain in prose in what sense it could legitimately be said to creak. She also could, and did, make it squeal, whine on the floor, bray like an ass, and perform other feats no doubt equally capable of justification. But creaking light is less capable of warming anyone's heart, now or in the future, than the luminous nose of the Dong. The same lack of informing vitality accounts for a certain disappointment that one experiences in reading the longer poems of Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell, in spite of lovely isolated passages. The only member of the family in direct contact with life was Mr. Osbert Sitwell, and his was almost wholly the negative reaction of the satirist.

It may have been inevitable, but it was none the

less tragic. No other age would have driven the Sitwells into Sitwellism.

Incomparably the most outstanding achievement in English verse, after the War, was however the work, not of an English, but of an American poet. For in America the tyranny of the average citizen, the dweller in Main Street, pressed even more severely upon the soul than that of the Little Man in England, and it had at last provoked to revolt a minority of elect spirits, of whom some, like Mr. Sinclair Lewis and Mr. Mencken, chastised their fellow-countrymen with the whips and scorpions of satire, but others, too proud to fight, took refuge in an intensive culture that had nothing distinctively American about it, but aimed at, and achieved, a spirit more purely cosmopolitan than any that had been astir since Latin had ceased to be the common language of Christendom. The two outstanding figures of this culture were Mr. Ezra Pound and Mr. T. S. Eliot, both of whom stood almost defiantly aloof from the sentiments and understandings of any but the inner circle of the initiated. Their erudition was flaunted continually in the face of their readers, from whom a corresponding erudition was expected as the price of understanding. The danger of this coming to justify the worst sense of the epithet "highbrow" is only too obvious, and even Mr. Eliot was not always proof against it. But Mr. Eliot's culture was based not only on erudition, but on a philosophy both subtle and profoundly thought out—such a philosophy of culture as Matthew Arnold had only been groping after.

It was this combination of qualities that enabled him, in 1922, to produce the masterpiece with which his name will always be associated, *The Waste Land*, a poem calculated to scare away all but the most determined seekers after beauty by its apparent lack of all intelligible sequence, its tags of quotation, sometimes childishly mutilated,<sup>1</sup> and the 7 pages of

<sup>1</sup> As for instance the alteration of a line of Webster to  
Oh keep far hence the dog that's friend to men.

explanatory footnotes, themselves requiring a knowledge of French, German, Dantesque Italian, Latin, and Provençal.

That the effort is worth making will become apparent to any reader with a soul to be captured by the sheer beauty of word music from start to finish of its five cantos, and the miraculous ease with which the poet attunes his instrument to every mood, from a mysticism as lofty as that of Blake to a realism as stark as that of Joyce. To penetrate the innermost depths of his meaning will, for once, repay such labour as the guardian of the treasure may see fit to impose on the seeker.

The poem is, in fact, as devastating an indictment of the age as ever a Jeremiah or a Swift could have framed. The Waste Land is the country of the modern soul; the doomed city of the poet's vision is *London, swarming with damned souls like those of Dante's Inferno*. The sordidness, the hopelessness, the futility of life in the kingdom of the Little Man, are depicted in a series of unforgettable impressions, and somewhere in the dim background we catch a glimpse of the hooded hordes who, like the Assyrians of old, are preparing to execute the final judgment upon an order of things unfit to survive. Mr. Eliot himself points to a way of salvation through the principles of Hindu Yoga—give, sympathize, control—but the frenzy of disjointed quotations with which the poem closes suggests that this is no more than a fevered dream, and that at most, salvation is for those individuals who can flee from their doomed cities to the refuge of a culture destined to become even more closely linked, in Mr. Eliot's mind, with religious orthodoxy.

Whether or not Mr. Eliot would have conceded the salvation of London for the sake of fifty, or even ten, cultured men, must be a matter for conjecture, but London certainly did contain an intelligentsia, that took its name from the British Museum district of Bloomsbury. It was in no sense an organized,

or even a localized group, and its personnel was not defined with any precision. It had a printing press of its own, set up in their own house by the critic and novelist, Mrs. Virginia Woolf, and her husband, and this was the sole outward and visible manifestation that explicitly embodied the Bloomsbury spirit, though the Liberal weekly *Nation* was generally recognized as its mouthpiece. Its philosopher was Mr. Bertrand—afterwards Lord—Russell; in art criticism it was represented by Mr. Roger Fry and Mr. Clive Bell; in economics by Mr. Keynes; Lytton Strachey figured as at least an associate member—somewhere on its confines hovered Mr. Aldous Huxley.

It was not the way of Bloomsbury to flee from the life around it, but rather to stand aloof and regard it with an analytical detachment, tinged by a faintly amused contempt. It had no message of salvation—it would have scorned to be associated with anything so vulgar. It had no use for enthusiasm, and a positive aversion from religion. It could expose, it could dissect, it could—though it would never have used the word—debunk the all-conquering Little Man and everything that was his. It could show how he had made his whole world in his own unspeakable little image—as stupid as possible, and then leave him to unmake or remake it as best he could.

Even Mr. Russell, whose mind was an engine of irresistible power for destructive analysis, was impotent to construct, and no wonder, since his philosophy had the effect of undermining all possible foundations, not only of constructive thought, but of the thinker's own personality. When he did try to strike a positive note, as in his book on the Conquest of Happiness, his thought did not differ appreciably in quality from that of the many treatises of popular uplift that were brought out under the designation of New Thought. And when his anti-Christian complex was aroused, he could drop the last pretence

of philosophic detachment, and thump the tub with any other threepenny God-queller.<sup>1</sup>

Bloomsbury was, in the Greek sense, a colony of Pre-war Cambridge. Its spirit was that which had informed the Heretics and Carbonari societies, its atmosphere was that of the sedulously advanced symposia of dons and undergraduates that had capped jokes about God in Lowes Dickinson's rooms. Keynes and Fry were King's men, Strachey and Russell Trinity. Mrs. Woolf was the daughter of another great Cambridge Rationalist, Leslie Stephen, whose motto for contributors to his Dictionary of National Biography might have been inscribed over the portals of the spiritual Bloomsbury—"No Flowers by Request". The soul was Mrs. Woolf's chosen province. As a biographical essayist she had a charm and delicacy comparable to that of Strachey himself; as a critic she was only second to Mr. Eliot; but it was as a novelist that her most significant work was done. Her fastidious genius was incapable of such crudity as that of the Behaviourists—of the truth of whose doctrines, it may be remarked, Mr. Russell has admitted his persuasion<sup>2</sup>—but in her own way she co-operated in their work of breaking up the human personality, resolving life itself into a fortuitous concourse of episodes, without value or significance, but interesting like the changing forms of clouds or patterns of a kaleidoscope. And so with the mind; Mrs. Woolf would never go to the absurdity of denying its existence—on the contrary, she could see deeper into it than most people. But she could see in it, as in life, nothing but an essentially meaningless procession of episodes. Life is neither real nor earnest—not even the grave is its goal, for there is

<sup>1</sup> Whether this is any exaggeration the reader can judge for himself, from the perusal of Lord Russell's *Why I am not a Christian*, the record of a lecture delivered at the Battersea Town Hall under the auspices of the National Secular Society. Price 3d.

<sup>2</sup> *The Scientific Outlook*, p. 186.

no goal. The stream flows past us; nothing abides, not even the stream itself; but it is worth while to sit on the bank and observe, with a detached scrutiny, the changing effects of light on the surface, and perhaps a trout lurking in the shadows, or a pebble gleaming from the depths of a pool. These things have no special significance, but they are at least interesting. And interest is all that one can reasonably expect from life such as ours.

The artistic contribution of this singularly brilliant group was in keeping. Mr. Roger Fry, not only a critic but a painter in almost, if not quite, the first rank, along with Mr. Clive Bell, carried to completion the re-orientation of British art criticism they had undertaken before the War. New vistas, undreamed of in King Edward's England, were revealed, and the revolution effected by the French Post-impressionists was confirmed among that minority of British artists to whom painting was more than a trade, like the street walker's, of giving pleasure to those who could pay for it. But the effect of their teaching was to withdraw art completely from life, to reduce—or raise—it to a matter of pure technique, a counterpoint of mass and colour values. That art could be in any sense the expression of a nation's soul would have seemed to them, as it did to Whistler, the last word in Philistinism.

This was particularly unfortunate for British art, which has, more markedly than that of any other nation, maintained close contact with life.

The Bloomsbury oracles had a positive distaste for the art of their own countrymen, and lost no opportunity of belittling it. "English form," said Mr. Bell, in what was at least good English phraseology, "is normally a stone below French. At any given moment the best painter in England is unlikely to be better than a first-rate man in the French second class."<sup>1</sup> The effect of statements of this kind was not only to confirm the blindness of Englishmen to

<sup>1</sup> *Sincer Cézanne*, p. 190.



the glories of their own past—no other nation would have forgotten such a master as John Riley<sup>1</sup>—but it tended to engender a sense of national inferiority that hung like a millstone round the neck of contemporary British art. But it was all in keeping with the determination of the British intelligentsia to fix the widest possible gulf between itself and the British public.

The aversion was mutual. The ordinary man, who was becoming more and more cheerfully identified with the Little Man, had no use for intellectuals. The Labour Party, towards which many of these would have gravitated, had less use for their services than any other. Even such recruits as Russell and Wells could find no better employment than that of Uriah the Hittite, in being put up to fight hopeless constituencies. And the intellectuals, in their turn, remained not only ostentatiously unhelpful, but tended to become more and more contemptuous and bitter.

There was Mr. Wyndham Lewis, who before the War had started a movement called Vorticism, more or less an equivalent of Italian Futurism, whose most intelligible aim was to be more advanced than anything outside it. After the War he developed into a sort of professional enemy—*The Enemy* was the name he gave to what was, in effect, a one-man magazine—and as such he devoted himself, not without a certain zest, to the task of scanning his contemporaries, and most of all, his fellow intellectuals. It was good sport for everybody concerned, for it was easier for Mr. Lewis to be an enemy than to make enemies, but it led to worse than nowhere—from contempt for men to impatience with their freedom, and ultimately to coquetting with tyranny in the shape of Fascism and Hitlerism; betraying civilization to its real and mortal enemy.

<sup>1</sup> It is lamentable that what was supposed to be a representative exhibition of British national art in 1934, contained not a single one of Riley's portraits, and that not a critic—at least to the present author's knowledge—commented on the omission.

But the enmity of Mr. Lewis was nothing to the ruthlessness with which Mr. Aldous Huxley, the brightest star in this intellectual galaxy, exposed and explored the lowest depths of human nature, in its phase of contemporary evolution. Mr. Huxley's genius united all the talents. As a poet, he was one of the picked pioneers of *Wheels*; as a scientist, he had inherited the Huxley tradition; he was a friend and intimate associate of D. H. Lawrence; he was equally at home in all the arts; he had the gift of expressing himself through the medium of fiction; and to crown it all, he was in the first rank of contemporary humorists. In fact so exuberant, and apparently irresponsible, was his humour, in his earlier books, that it blinded his readers and critics to the desperate seriousness underlying it. It was as if a prophet had come into the city in the disguise of a Merry Andrew.

Mr. Huxley's view of human nature, was, in effect, that its ultimate and only reality was that of the body. This, for an admirer of Lawrence, would have been nothing remarkable. But beyond this, Mr. Huxley, in sentiment if not in theory, made a further and most significant advance by regarding the body, or at any rate the servitude to body, as essentially vile. He is never tired of rubbing in the humiliation of this servitude, at first with a laughter as bitter as that of Swift, but finally on the note of alternating horror and savagery that resounds throughout his *Point Counterpoint*. The climax of horror is reached in his description of the long-drawn-out agony of a child dying in the grip of meningitis, and in that of a neurotic murderer, fresh from the disposal of the corpse, who has to sit and listen to his employer prosing about the utilization of the phosphorus in cadavers; while for disgust, we have the exposure of animal lust in its most heartless, sordid, and nauseating extremes of degradation. Who shall deliver us from the body of this death?

We begin to realize the real secret of Mr. Huxley.

He is no Pagan—he has none of that spontaneous delight in the body and its fulfilment that is the essence of Paganism. Against the dominance of the flesh, even though he sees no hope of escape, his soul is in furious revolt. He is, in fact, a Puritan—all the more, because he has carried Puritanism to its logical conclusion of discarding God and the Bible, as the Church and Free Will had already been discarded by Calvin. On the surface there may be the tolerance of Thelema, but all beneath there is a burning, an agonizing, hatred of sin, that at first vents itself in satire—as when, in the Kirk of sixteenth-century Scotland, first one member of the congregation and then another was dragged out and made to sit beneath the preacher on the gowk's stool—but finally takes the form of a sermon, mercilessly drawn out, on the one unvarying text, "The wages of sin is Death! The wages of sin is DEATH!"

We find in Mr. Huxley all the intransigence of the true Puritan, who sees a sinner in every passer-by, and a sin in every action. Not even St. Francis is found pure in his sight; not even that idol of all the moderns, Baudelaire, can be excused the gowk's stool. Your true Puritan is no respecter of persons, and he will apportion the wages of sin to the uttermost farthing. None escape. Mr. Huxley looks upon the life of his time, or rather upon the narrow circle of modern intellectuals with which it is his special province to deal, and he finds nothing but futility of mind and nastiness of flesh. To read his novels and stories would almost convince one that the whole modern age did not contain one remotely lovable character; that tenderness and pity, that a pure or disinterested motive, did not exist, or, at best, was too exceptional to be worth taking into account. The irruption of a saint or a hero into Mr. Huxley's world would shatter it to pieces.

It was only in the ensuing decade that Mr. Huxley exchanged the black gown of the Puritan for the prophet's mantle, that he might become something

more than a Jeremiah to his age. For Jeremiah had been content with such crude and disputable chances as that of invasion. But for the sinners of the modern age there is no conceivable escape. Grant that no catastrophe overwhelms this generation or any that succeeds it; grant that all its brightest dreams are translated into realities, and that the whole world is turned into a prosperous and peaceful scientific Utopia, in which all the principles of Freud and Henry Ford are put into practice; then Mr. Huxley will take you into that future and show you a hell on earth more hopeless, more ignoble, than the lowest circle of Inferno. There is no escape, not in science, not even in success, from the wages of sin.

The fact that, like another prophet, Mr. Huxley had started out to deliver a very different message, only renders his actual utterance more impressive. As one of the older Puritans might have put it, the hand of the Lord was upon him.

But he is a prophet with no message of salvation. For he is also a Puritan—and unlike the Knoxes and Calvins of an earlier age, is consistent in the renunciation of free will. You are saved or damned, and there is nothing to be done about it, or if there is, your master, the body, will not let you do it. At best there is a limited and temporary salvation for the elect of the intellect. But nobody can rise from the perusal of such books as *Point Counterpoint* and *Brave New World* without feeling that modern Man and his civilization—so far as their author may be trusted—are well and truly damned.

It was only the average Englishman's belief in getting on with the job of the moment, without stopping to think, that could have rendered him callous to the practically unanimous verdict passed on his civilization by the Post-war generation of intellectuals. Not one of them had the least use or the least hope for it. To most, it was not even worth the compliment of rebellion. That Abomination of Desolation, the Kingdom of the Last Man, that

maketh everything small, stood too firmly to be challenged. Of those few who repudiated allegiance, most contented themselves with retiring into cells or communities of a culture as different as possible from the life without. Only a few remained at large to expose or satirize. It was something to England's credit that they were even allowed to do this, and not, as in Fascibolshevist countries, compelled to prostitute their souls and look cheerful, or take the consequences.

But if there is any truth in the saying that, where there is no vision, the people perish, the withdrawal of vision from the people is a phenomenon of some seriousness.

But all this was as nothing to the Little Man himself, who cared more for his politicians and press lords than he did for his highbrows, and who had writers and artists galore to tickle his palate. For one reader of the Sitwells' poems there were certainly a hundred for those of Miss Wilhelmina Stitch, and probably of Miss Fay Inchfawn, to whom, in their own unpretentious line, nobody could grudge their success, but who would scarcely have claimed a place even on the lower slopes of Parnassus. The gallant attempt of *The Outlook* to provide intellectual pabulum for twopence a week only, foredoomed it to extinction, while *John Bull*, at the same price, was increasing its sales to over a million.

The colossal vogue of writers like Edgar Wallace and Miss Ethel Dell was nothing remarkable or specially new, but what constitutes perhaps the most remarkable literary phenomenon of the time was the fame and fortune achieved by Mr. A. S. M. Hutchinson's *If Winter Comes*. For Mr. Hutchinson was a writer of the loftiest pretensions, one who not only had a gospel to proclaim, but sought to remould the style of the English language into an instrument fit for its delivery. The effect was as if Mr. James Joyce had been trying to make a *reductio ad absurdum* of the sentiment of Mr. John Galsworthy. But the sudden and overwhelming success achieved by the

book, after a not specially encouraging start, did show that in spite of all appearances, there was a public looking for spiritual leadership, and ready to cry "Lo here!" to anyone who appeared remotely capable of giving it. But who could look for salvation from the clinics of Vienna or the flats of Bloomsbury? What comfort was there on the dissecting table of Mr. Huxley, or guidance from the darker oracles of Mr. Eliot? In Mr. Hutchinson the spirit was at least willing, whatever else may have been weak.

## CHAPTER V

### SEX IN THE LIMELIGHT

The spate of competitive candour on the subject of the War has left almost untouched its effect on the women who were sucked into the maelstrom. "The women were splendid" is considered to be the first and last word on the whole matter—a true word as far as it goes, but palpably short of the whole truth. Nobody would wish to belittle the enthusiasm and self-sacrifice that animated so many of the women war-workers—though for not a few the highly-paid jobs that were to be had for the asking represented the chance of a lifetime. But to talk as if the women volunteers had an exemption, denied to the men, from the brutalizing effects of War, is as much as to say that the answer to the question "Can men gather grapes from thorns?" should be, "Perhaps not, but women can."

As anyone with a memory of that time can confirm, the effect of the War upon the young women who were taken from their homes, and pitchforked into a life that combined the discipline with the freedom of military service, was revolutionary in a sense only likely to be agreeable to those extreme feminists, who hold that women, being better than men, have a right to be men and a bit worse. At best, there was a coarsening of fibre. The war girl tended to conform to a rough-and-ready type, free of speech and lacking in delicacy.

She also, for better or worse, enjoyed a sexual freedom that would have been inconceivable to the Edwardians, however gay, or in the Nineties, however

naughty. When she was free from her work, she was free also for the companionship of men who were enjoying a brief respite from the horrors of the trenches, and most probably doomed to premature and agonizing death. And in the atmosphere of patriotic hysteria that prevailed, it came to be accounted as almost mean-spirited to deny some poor boy what might be his last pleasure on earth.

Mrs. Dora Russell, a witness who can hardly be accused of bias in favour of Mrs. Grundy, tells us how "strange to say, the nearness of death from enemy bombs or enemy fire did not intensify the thought of holiness and heaven. It made the little footrules made to measure morality look absurd; it mocked the emptiness of female virtue. When poverty and parents forbade the certainty of marriage, with nothing but uncertainty and death around them, our modern Aspasia's took the love of men and gave the love of woman . . ." <sup>1</sup> which is of course a very nice way of putting it. A more old-fashioned rendering would be that the War was responsible for not a little indulgence of carnal affection and disregard of sexual inhibitions among the younger women in all classes of society.

Naturally too, as in only exceptional cases were they liable to become casualties, the war girls survived the War in practically full force, and became—with diminishing plausibility as the years went on—accepted as the type of Post-war young womanhood. In fact, this type underwent almost an apotheosis. Nothing was more common than for journalists and cartoonists to contrast the femininity of the Victorian young lady—always grotesquely exaggerated for the purpose—with the presumably superior attractions of strapping and sweating he-women frantically engaged in athletic contest or mechanical speeding. The very term "*womanly*" became one of abuse or ridicule.

One result of this was to put an inquisitorial ban on every sort of romantic or tender sentiment. This

<sup>1</sup> *Hypatia*, p. 32.



sort of thing was, in the lingo of the time, "sloppy" or "smarmy". It was the fashion to be brutally direct about the most intimate facts of life. No novelist who aspired to be abreast of the time would spare his or her reader as many references as could be dragged in to what he or she would persist in miscalling the lavatory. Love between the sexes had become a physiological fact, to be discussed with no more sentiment than you would get in a hospital ward. And in fact, it would be rather absurd to indulge in tender sentiment about a nymph who would call you a bloody fool for your pains.

And yet there was never a time when sex and everything connected with it were cultivated with so obsessive an ardour. The old, Pre-war suffragettes, who had thought earnestly of the mission of Woman and her equality with Man on a basis of sex-free comradeship, were as much out of date as the dodo. The first thing that a bisexual electorate did with its vote was to throw out every woman candidate,<sup>1</sup> including even the formidable Miss Christabel Pankhurst. The absence of sentiment in the demobbed war-worker by no means implied indifference to the pleasures of sex. On the contrary, she had been taught to take the shortest possible cut to a good time.

It is not surprising, under these circumstances, that the period immediately following the War should have witnessed a certain tendency towards the slackening of sexual inhibitions. To this several causes, besides the habits picked up during the War, contributed. It was a time of nervous overstrain and exhaustion, a time when everyone was suffering from something akin to shell-shock. And it is notorious that nervous patients are not only more deficient in self-control, but also more obsessed by the sex motive than people in normal health. It is not the first time in history that nervous tension has sought relief through the outlet of sex passion.

<sup>1</sup> With the technical exception of the Sinn Féiner, Countess Markievicz, who never took her seat.

Again, the War had brought about a great, temporary shortage of eligible men, and in consequence a large residue of women who could not hope for fulfilment of their sex life within the bonds of matrimony. Add to this, that such fulfilment was rendered a great deal more practicable by the increased facilities for birth control. And the religious sanctions, by which chastity had been upheld, were no longer considered, by the majority of young people, any bar to the pursuit of a good time.

It is not remarkable, under such circumstances, that we should find, in fiction of the best-selling variety, an exploitation of the cock and hen type of relationship between human beings. Mr. Geoffrey Moss's *Sweet Pepper*, for instance, presents us with the portrait of a charming and sympathetic young lady, released from war-work at Vienna, and desirous of finding the means of stocking a chicken farm, who has the bright idea of hiring herself out as a whore to members of the Hungarian nobility. The Ursula Trent of W. L. George has not even the excuse of the new poverty, but breaks loose from the county set in which she has been brought up, from what appear to be motives of impure and simple nymphomania. And then there is Robert Keable's *Sinon called Peter*, the story of a war-time Padre who devotes himself to the imitation of a Christ remarkably like that of Mr. D. H. Lawrence, and fulfils the yearnings of his interesting soul in fornication with a by no means unwilling nurse.

It would however be a mistake to accept the evidence of plays and novels, and even of the contemporary Press, without the greatest caution, where the life of normal people is concerned. Fiction does not pretend to be fact, and the journalist, depicting the social scene, is supplying the sort of stimulus he thinks his readers want, and not trying to arrive at a balanced estimate of the truth. It is the exception and not the rule that has news value. Philippa drunk is news; Phillada sober is none. When Mr.

Noel Coward displays on the stage a couple of married ladies engaged in a drunken brawl about a lover, it does not prove that this is the common form of social intercourse—rather the reverse. For unless it were more shocking than anything the audience would be likely to experience themselves, it would lose all its thrill.

It has been necessary to make this qualification, because in every history of our time that deals with social matters, the evidence of such public entertainers appears to be accepted as valid without qualification, and there is danger of a grossly-exaggerated caricature being transmitted to posterity as an authentic portrait. No doubt the effects of the War on the manners and morals of the survivors, particularly of the rising generation, were far from negligible in the period of nervous exhaustion that immediately succeeded it. But anyone capable of trusting the evidence of his own memory against that of the printed word, will agree that they were nothing like as sensational as they were painted by interested artists, or rather, that the sensational manifestations were confined to a small minority, who in consequence secured the full blaze of journalesque limelight.

Even after the War, there was money enough available to finance a pursuit of pleasure in ways so feverish as to be definitely neurotic. There were cases in the courts that were eagerly written up by the papers as revelations of dreadful goings on in fashionable or Bohemian circles—nothing quite so sensational as the Oscar Wilde affair in the Nineties, but still lurid enough; cases of drug slavery; allegations of conduct in high places that would certainly, before the War, have earned the epithet *shameless*; cases even in which the revolver was requisitioned for the final solution of the sex problem. There was a great deal of attention solicited for the illegalities of night clubs, though these amounted to no more than the *disregard*, by everybody concerned, of a purely arbitrary law forbidding the sale after a certain hour,

and at extortionate prices, of liquors that, taken in sufficient quantities, might be intoxicating. But it was assumed that places constantly raided by the police must be excessively naughty, and certainly they included what Mr. Evelyn Waugh would describe as low joints, at which Venus as well as Bacchus took toll of the clients. But the average fashionable night club was as harmless as the average fashionable hotel.

Journalese attention was focussed to an extraordinary degree on what was christened the cocktail habit, or in plain English, gin swigging. To judge by accounts in the contemporary Press, you might imagine that this craze had captured the entire upper and middle classes of England, and that every young woman was as certainly a gin-bibber as she was a user of lipstick. This was a wild exaggeration. There were no doubt sets in which not only cocktail parties, but even such picturesque exaggerations as bottle and pyjama parties, were in vogue. But the great middle class was very little affected, if only for the reason that it had its nose too close against the grindstone to be able to afford such luxuries. And to the country houses, except those tenanted by the *nouveau riches*, the habit was slow to penetrate. Old fashioned people were even inclined to look down on it as a little vulgar.

If the present author may cite his own experience of a partially-suburbanized Hertfordshire town, he would doubt whether there were three houses, at any time during the Nineteen-twenties, at which a cocktail could have been obtained for love or money. He could not answer personally for more than one.

To judge by the printed word, there was a cult not only of gin, but of Youth itself, spelt with largest of Y's. Youth was supposed to think, claim, or assert, this, that or the other thing. Young people were depicted as blaming the War and all its attendant miseries on to their elders, and as being grimly determined not only to run the world themselves, but also to treat the older generation with calculated rudeness and disrespect. Perhaps there were as

many unmannerly hobbledchoys after as before the War,<sup>1</sup> and rather more cheeky flappers. But except for a few self-conscious undergraduates, the cult of youth remained the monopoly, as it had been the invention, of middle-aged newspaper men. The young people themselves were too busy getting a living or a good time to think about Youth in the abstract. As for reforming the social order, that kind of serious ambition was decidedly less in vogue than in the early enthusiastic days of the Fabian Society and the School of Economics.

The business of writing up, and photographing, the usually commonplace proceedings of people who were supposed to belong to London Society, had gone on with unabated vigour through the War, and flourished more than ever after it. The Snob Press, with its almost unbelievable vapidness and vulgarity, answered to one of the most firmly-rooted instincts of the British bourgeoisie, and had an additional source of income from not a few of the plutocratic pushers, whose daughters it advertised in a manner reminiscent of the Bagdad slave-markets. Some of these people hired regular publicity agents, and there was a form of blackmail levied by editors,<sup>2</sup> who were known to reward a refusal to contribute with neglect or worse.

One of the stunts that was worked up from this source was that of the antics of a small set, who christened themselves, or were christened by the journalists, the *Bright Young Things*. Something of the sort had probably been in existence, in one form or another, since the days of the Bucks and the Mohocks, and had been very much to the fore in the time just before the War, when it had found expression in quite ingenious hoaxes. Post-war brightness never amounted to much more than a display of childish ill-manners. A party was advertised to which grown-up

<sup>1</sup> I doubt it though. The temporary commission had been a school of manners.

<sup>2</sup> A minority, I gladly believe.

people came dressed as babies, and were wheeled about in perambulators, shouting and disturbing the neighbours up to all hours in the morning. Motors were driven through the streets at a murderous pace in the course of treasure hunts. One young gentleman actually distinguished himself by smashing up the contents of a lady's bedroom. In any other time, such proceedings would have been quietly ignored, or dealt with in such a way that their authors would have realized the expediency of playing the fool in their own houses. But thanks to the advertisement they received, they were treated, and seem only too likely to pass into history, as a social phenomenon of the first importance.

Naturally youth, with its proneness to suggestion, did occasionally try to play up to the expectations of its boosters. The college rag, for instance, which had formerly been a spontaneous combustion of youthful high spirits, became a self-conscious ritual, in which soot and flour were supplied in advance, with girl students taking part, and the reporters in attendance. But in England, attempts to organize youth never got much further than this primitive stage, at any rate during the Nineteen-twenties. A few Fascisti did attempt to get started, but they never recovered from the ridicule that followed their adoption of the significant initials—B.F.

We see, then, that in estimating the style of life of the Post-war epoch, we are handicapped by the fact that the Press, supported by the stage and the novel, already holds the field with an account that, where it is not actually false, is so misleading by its emphasis of the exceptional and trivial, and by its suppression of the normal, as to be rather worse than valueless as evidence.

Let us try, as best we can, to sift the grain from all this chaff, and form some notion of what changes really were taking place. We need not indulge in the dream of a young womanhood seduced every week end and fuddled with gin every evening, in order to

realize that immediately after the War there was a marked tendency to what one can only describe as defeminization. This, one cannot help thinking, was largely due to the dominance of the hard-boiled war-service women. And as the younger generation arose to take their place, a reaction set in that by the end of the Nineteen-twenties was tending to something like a Victorian revival.

But for some years after the War it was the fashion for young women to dress and behave in as mannish a way as possible. Even the seductive curves of the feminine figure became an offence. The bosom that had aroused the romantic passions of the Victorians in whiskers, and the part of the anatomy that the bustle had emphasized for the benefit of those with beards and moustaches, were both planed down, or slimmed to a level of masculine flatness. Even the hair, the traditional glory of Woman, was first bobbed and finally, in extreme instances, cropped like a man's. An exception to this tendency was the use and display of cosmetics with the unabashed frankness that characterized the Post-war woman.

Frank she certainly was, in word and deed, to the point of brutality. The honour of a girl consisted in being perfectly unshockable. Young people of both sexes thought nothing of discussing birth control and the most salacious complexes of psycho-analysis. Kissing became as common as handshaking, and meant as little. When a young man took out a girl for an evening's recreation, he expected a *fair return* for his outlay, and she thought nothing of giving it, within the recognized limits. For the rest, she was fully as capable of taking care of herself as he was. Sex was no longer a mystery or a romance, but a partnership in physiological enjoyment.

It was only to be expected that the cult of masculinity in the female should be accompanied by a compensating increase of effeminacy in the male. And something of this sort we do find among the young people who were coming to maturity just after the

War. These had been unfortunate in having to pass their early 'teens not only in an atmosphere of almost intolerable nervous tension, but also in conditions entailing definite under-nourishment. The reaction against the cult of manliness and patriotism preached during the War, gathered full strength in the years that followed it, and was most powerful of all among those who had been orphaned or bereaved without the chance of serving. And the most powerful incentive to manliness was withdrawn by the denial of scope to the protective instinct of the youth for the girl. The pally and hail-fellow-well-met misses in short skirts did not exactly appeal for protection; in fact, they were more likely to assume the office of protector themselves.

Here again, one needs to tread cautiously, and not generalize too sweepingly from extreme instances. But it is at least significant that at the Universities, and especially at Oxford, a cult of exaggerated effeminacy was not only fashionable, but tolerated. Men cultivated a habit of addressing each other in terms of feminine endearment, and affected a homosexual sentimentality that went far beyond that which had caused such scandal in the pages of Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. Nobody thought of being particularly shocked by it now, not even when the leaders of the undergraduate intelligentsia took to the use of cosmetics—it was reported of two of the most celebrated that they had quarrelled because one had copied the shade of the other's make-up, a story perhaps too good to be true, but none the less *ben trovato*.

It was perhaps not wholly unconnected with this tendency, that the qualities of grit and determination, that had been the secret of Britain's supremacy in her traditional field of sport, seemed all too conspicuously in abeyance. In almost every form of athletic contest in which English champions were pitted against those of other, and even daughter, nations, they suffered defeat, verging at times on disgrace. In boxing, England was reputed to have earned the horizontal



championship of the world. In cricket, All England teams, formidable on paper, crumpled and wilted before the dogged tactics of the Australians. In golf and tennis, in athletic sports, it was just the same. There was nothing for it but to discover that the grapes were sour, and that nothing would induce an Englishman to concentrate his whole energies on what was after all only a game.

It would be idle to argue as if this represented any permanent lowering of the national virility. Like the corresponding phase of feminine mannishness, it did not outlast the nervous and mental exhaustion that was the immediate legacy of the War, and towards the close of the ensuing decade signs were not lacking that the vogue of the Pansy and the hard-boiled virgin was waning to its close.

At no time, certainly, was there any such orgie of sexual incontinence as the more sensational accounts of the time would give one to believe. The fact that the Post-war girl was brutally realistic about sex, did not mean that she was a practising Aspasia. There were no doubt a substantial minority who exploited the new knowledge of contraceptives without stint or shame. Among the women workers in shops and offices, there must have been not a few who, with the prospect of a suitable marriage indefinitely remote, encouraged or permitted liaisons of the kind so vividly described in Mr. Eliot's *Waste Land*, in which the typist, after the visit of the small house agent's clerk,

Smoothes her hair with automatic hand,  
And puts a record on the gramophone.

But the solid rock of British upper- and middle-class respectability remained impervious to anything worse than a little chipping of the surface. To talk as if a clean sweep had been made of all Victorian taboos might be safe from challenge, but it would be grossly at variance with the facts. In spite of the falling off of church attendance and slump in dogmatic

faith among all classes alike, the various religious bodies, and their leaders, exercised an influence that had no parallel in any other country except Ireland. When Broadcasting became established under the auspices of the State, it was conducted with a piety that would have satisfied Archbishop Laud, in all but its lack of Anglican exclusiveness. In the army, even under conditions of war-time conscription, free-thinking soldiers were compelled to go to Christian services, just as the Christian converts in the service of old Rome had been required to sacrifice to a Divine Cæsar. The stage and screen were purged of anything that could be remotely offensive to sectarian sensibilities.

And there was a militant Puritanism in high places that in some ways surpassed anything dreamed of in Victorian times. This was particularly rife under the Home Secretaryship of Mr. Joynson Hicks, one of the sternest and most unbending of old-fashioned Evangelicals, from 1924 to 1929. The oldest profession in the world, hard hit by amateur competition, was harried with a thoroughness to which there had been no parallel under the auspices of the Great Queen. The promenades and cafés at which ladies of the town had marketed their services were suppressed or cleaned up. The last of the old meaty sporting papers, whose bawdy japes had been the delight of every smoking-room in the country, became mealy mouthed and passed away as pure as Sir Galahad. The efforts of the police to purge the London Parks of vice were so unrelenting, and produced such notorious scandals, that it was not safe for any decent person to walk or sit in them after dusk. Smuggling became a crime forced on anyone who wished to keep *au fait* with the contemporary masterpieces of his own country's literature.

The Defence of the Realm Act, the hated *Dora*, survived the War, and imposed restrictions on personal liberty that led directly to whatever scandals were associated with night clubs, and drove thousands

of British holiday-makers to spend their money on the amenities provided by the French and Belgian coast towns. Never, since the days of Praise-god Barebones and the Major-Generals of the New Model, had virtue been enforced with so heavy a hand. But there was not, as there had been in the days of the Commonwealth, a force of public opinion strong enough to shatter the power of the saints at the first opportunity.

It was not sin, in the old-fashioned sense, that was particularly prominent or particularly dangerous during the Post-war years. But there was a more subtle peril of what could best be described as mental and even nervous inadequacy. For the Peace had given civilized man another, and perhaps a final opportunity, to take thought and put his house in order. But if wisdom and good will should fail him, if from lack of steadfastness he should make the great refusal to face the truth and command his destiny, not all the copybook virtues would avail him to save his soul alive.

*It is a fact not without significance that the discipline of morals was one of the prime functions of the new dictatorship, or tyranny, that was beginning to capture the nations of Central Europe.*

## BOOK IV

# UNSTABLE EQUILIBRIUM

### CHAPTER I

#### HONESTY AS POLICY

The General Election of November 1922, was as startling as the Conservative revolt that had precipitated it. To many, even friendly observers, it had seemed impossible that, under a system of universal franchise, there could ever be such a thing as an independent Conservative majority. There were even fears of a class-conscious vote putting into power a Socialist Government pledged to such revolutionary expedients as the capital levy. The most confidently-predicted outcome was a stalemate between the three parties, and some new form of coalition.

The results declared on the night of the polling did indeed show a heavy swing of industrial, working-class constituencies to the left. On the banks of the Clyde, the most teeming and distressed district of all, there were sweeping victories for Labour. But the swing had not yet gathered revolutionary momentum, and though Labour nearly trebled its membership of the Commons, this still fell short of a quarter. As the later results came in, it became evident that the strength of the Conservative Party had been seriously underrated. The agricultural constituencies, and the *residential districts in the towns*, were almost solid for it, nor was it without support even among the town workers. Birmingham, the stronghold of the Chamberlain tradition, returned an unbroken Con-

servative phalanx. The Liberal Party, split into rival factions under two bitterly hostile leaders, and ground between the upper and nether millstones, had its total numbers still further reduced.

The completed returns showed Mr. Bonar Law's Government confirmed in power with the comfortable majority of 79, and Labour, beyond question, in possession of the Opposition Front Bench, and consequently, heir presumptive of ministerial power. Had it not been for that veritable godsend to Unionism, the dissolution of the Union with Ireland, the result would have been a complete stalemate.

Nothing is more remarkable, in English political history, than the way in which the electorate, in spite of the ignorance, bias, or indifference of its individuals, does time and again manage to return a majority expressive of a national purpose. Even in the days of the old, unreformed Parliament, with its corruption and its grossly unrepresentative franchise, the nation did repeatedly contrive to get its authentic will expressed at elections, as in the time of the Long and the Cavalier Parliaments, of the Sacheverell Trial, of Fox's "Martyrs", and of the Reform Bill itself.

This was more than ever the case under the practically universal franchise of Post-war years. In 1918 the people had been drunken with victory, and wanted to trust its destinies to the man it believed capable of winning the Peace as well as the War. By 1922 it had become thoroughly disillusioned. It wanted no more Welsh wizardry, nor was it yet ready to trust to the magic of a Socialist Utopia. It had chosen Mr. Bonar Law very much in the spirit of the Prayer Book, "that under him we may be godly and quietly governed"—governed, that is to say, not by wizardry and conjuring tricks, but by that combination of solid virtues that to the English mind constitutes character. It was the same mandate that had been given to Lord Salisbury and to Sir Robert Peel. It was the English version of normalcy.

Normalcy is the strong suit of Conservatism, as it

was of its ancestor, the old, Tory Royalism. The Englishman has a profound sense of organic continuity, and he distrusts that form of political surgery that is never content without the use of the knife. The long eclipse of the Conservative, as an independent Party, had dated from its adoption of Joseph Chamberlain's revolutionary fiscal policy. This had been shelved, for the time being, by Mr. Bonar Law's pledge not to effect any general change of tariffs during the lifetime of that Parliament.

But the very success of the wirepullers who had engineered the revolt against the Coalition had started the new Government with a crippling handicap. The elder statesmen who had been members of the late Administration, and had stood staunchly to the last by Mr. Lloyd George, were debarred from service under Mr. Bonar Law. Only Lord Curzon retained his post, and Mr. Stanley Baldwin was rewarded for his decisive intervention at the Carlton Club Meeting by being made Chancellor of the Exchequer. But the team that Bonar Law was able to scrape together was not inaptly described as a second eleven. It was certainly the most mediocre Cabinet of the century. It consisted mostly of worthy but quite undistinguished lords and gentlemen, and as such was not calculated to inspire enthusiasm in the country. This was relying on character a little too exclusively.

For the Englishman, however conservative he may be, does not tolerate stagnation in his rulers. His belief in continuity in dynamic, and the stream that broadens down from precedent to precedent is, for that very reason, one of progress. The new Government was hardly in the saddle before it had reason to know on how precarious a tenure it held the support of the electorate. In February, 1923, three of the Ministers who had failed to get elected in November contested the apparently safe Conservative seats vacated for their benefit. Every one of these was captured by Labour, the prime reason being the

feebleness, and reactionary bias, that the Government showed in dealing with the still acute Housing problem. In April, it actually sustained a defeat in the House, owing to its unsympathetic attitude to the claims of ex-service men in the civil service, and it was only after a tremendous uproar, and what was virtually a surrender, that it was able to avoid resignation.

From the very first, it became evident that the outstanding personality among Mr. Bonar Law's colleagues was destined to be that of the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Stanley Baldwin. Early in the year, he set forth to the United States on a mission of the utmost importance, to put on a permanent footing the payment of the vast tribute to America with which Britain had been forced to saddle herself during the War. In theory her position was by no means unfavourable, for the War had left her, on the balance, a creditor nation, since she had more than twice as much owing to her, by her other allies, as she herself owed to America. But was she ever likely to get paid? The whole structure of tribute depended on the ability of the Allies to extract the whole amount from Germany, and settle their own accounts out of the proceeds. Failing that, there would be nothing for it but for the victors themselves to undertake the obligations that all their might and all their rigour had failed to impose on the vanquished. Their statesmen would have to tax their own countrymen in order to send the proceeds overseas, just as when the whole realm of England was bled white to raise a ransom for Richard Cœur-de-Lion—only this ransom would have to be paid, not once only, but again and again for sixty-two mortal years. It was certain that no nation, except England, would have dreamed, from motives of sheer honesty, of placing herself in the position of a vanquished power, by honouring such obligations for a moment.

It came to this—that unless Germany could be properly squeezed, England might whistle for her

credits, whatever she decided to do about her debts. There are disadvantages in being the one honest debtor in a defaulting world.

England had, in 1922, made a very simple and, formally at any rate, generous proposal. In view of the much greater sums that were owing to her than she owed herself, and in view also of the poison that this whole business of debts was injecting into the system of world civilization, she was ready, and in fact would have preferred, to cancel the debts altogether and start on a clean sheet. Failing this, she would extract no more from her creditors than was necessary to settle her own account with America.

Quite apart from the rights and wrongs of the matter, it must be obvious to-day that the world would have been a happier and more prosperous planet, in its Western no less than its Eastern Hemisphere, if this proposal had been adopted. But idealism and the world view had been damned, in America, along with Wilson, and normalcy held sway under the auspices of that exceedingly practical individual, Warren Harding. The reaction to the English—or Balfour—note was positively hostile. That England should expect America to sacrifice something for nothing was bad enough; that she should set the example by waiving claims of her own was almost worse. Uncle Sam felt that John Bull was being virtuous *at* him. And his reply was a plain intimation that anything not nominated in the bond was outside the sphere of practical discussion.

In Mr. Stanley Baldwin, Britain had sent to Washington a statesman of very unusual type, almost the exact reverse of the professional politician. He was, in the scriptural sense, a man without guile. He went beyond mere honesty—he was actively disinterested to the point of quixotry. He had, just after the War, almost crippled himself financially, by assessing himself for a voluntary levy, and handing the proceeds, under a seal of strict anonymity, to the State, in the vain hope that his example would be



generally followed, and that men who had not had the opportunity to give their lives for their country would welcome that of giving their money.

When he was in a position to speak and act, not on his own behalf, but that of his country, he did so with the same proud integrity of honour. That England should ever repudiate an obligation, even in thought, stood not within the prospect of his belief, not, at any rate, in 1923. He had gone to Washington, as the experienced business man he was, to strike the best bargain he could for his country, but always on the understanding that John Bull was one of those who, having sworn to his neighbour, disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hindrance.

To such a nimble mind as that of Mr. Lloyd George, it was only natural that it should have occurred, after the event, to criticize Mr. Baldwin for not having made any settlement between England and America, part of a general arrangement for that of the whole body of war debts. A round table conference, at which France and Italy at least should have been represented, would have been the most equitable method of approach. But it was not the method favoured by America, and in stipulating for it the English representative could not have avoided the implication—however tactfully masked—that England's willingness to pay was to some extent conditioned by that of her fellow debtors. And that, to a mentality such as Mr. Baldwin's, would have been unthinkable.

No doubt he relied on his countrymen to support him in this view, just as he had relied on his fellow-Capitalists to follow his example in helping to liquidate their country's internal war debt. In the world of modern politics such an attitude was as unique as that of a Portia who should have been above relying on a legal quibble, and should have assumed her client's obligation to part with a pound of flesh, blood and all, according to the honest interpretation of the bond. It was, at any rate, in striking contrast with

that of such a brutal realist as M. Poincaré, who made it very clear that none of France's debtors would get a sou, unless it could be extracted from Germany, along with preferably a few others as a reward for French honesty.

On the assumption that Britain's obligation to pay was absolute and unqualified, Mr. Baldwin struck a very tolerable bargain. Britain had been paying 5 per cent, and America was asking for a  $4\frac{1}{2}$  basis for a funding arrangement, so that to get it cut down to 3 per cent for the first ten years, rising after that to  $3\frac{1}{2}$ , was as good as could be expected, and as long as Britain could collect even half of her own debts, it would merely be a question of passing on with her right hand what she received with her left. But even so, Mr. Baldwin had done, and could do, nothing to secure that Britain should have at least as good terms as were conceded to America's other debtors, and that while John Bull was paying through the nose for his own integrity, he should not enjoy the spectacle of his neighbours being let off in proportion to their lack of it.

Nor did he even secure that the creditor, while extracting full payment from the debtor, should not at the same time debar him from paying in the most obvious and practicable form, that of goods. This America was determined to prevent, for the excellent reason that it would have harmed her at least as much as Britain. She demanded gold, and as gold had been stipulated for in the first instance, gold it had to be.

Bonar Law, that hard-headed and gloomy man, was much perturbed on learning to what sort of an arrangement his envoy had been beguiled. But to have repudiated it now might have entailed consequences still more serious, and it was too great an assertion of authority to expect from a dying man. In the country, the reception of the scheme was almost unanimously favourable—even Mr. Lloyd George, at the first news, vouchsafed a sort of blessing,

before proceeding to anathema. Mr. Baldwin's prestige was immensely enhanced. The average Englishman was relieved to have got the matter settled in what seemed to him a businesslike and friendly way. The very idea of repudiation had not crossed his mind, and he felt that he could look the whole world in the face, with an added sense of security now that the soundness of the old firm of Bull had been so triumphantly vindicated. Nor was he sensible of any particular inconvenience. Mr. Baldwin was able to follow up his settlement with a Budget framed on the soundest lines of Conservative finance, taking another sixpence off the income tax, along with other remissions, and establishing a permanent sinking fund for the liquidation of debt.

## CHAPTER II

### THE INVASION OF GERMANY

But what the British public did not realize was that this ingenious structure, that had got to last for the next sixty-two years, was built upon the sand, the quicksand, of German Reparations payments. The debt could only be prevented from becoming an intolerable tribute, so long as a worse tribute could be extracted from Germany. But this amiable arrangement, fixed up by the victors at Versailles, had so far only produced an insignificant fraction of what had been expected of it, and was now showing every sign of breaking down altogether. It was becoming evident that even irresistible force is incapable of extracting blood from a stone.

Evident, that is to say, to all who were capable of judging the matter dispassionately. But this was a feat of which the French mind, under the régime of M. Poincaré, was still incapable. To the Frenchman it was the torture of Tantalus to see the fruits of victory crumbling to ashes whenever he tried to grasp them. There could be only one explanation—the Boche was defrauding him; the Boche had not even yet learnt the lesson of his defeat. It was only a question of driving the victory home with sufficient relentlessness. And now there was a strong man at the helm who would stick at nothing short of getting the uttermost farthing, and whose policy was that of seizing his debtor by the throat with a cry of, "Pay me that thou owest!"

There was something more in this than mere policy. There were no doubt sinister and corrupt

interests at work behind the scenes, and statesmen whose deliberate policy it was to drive Germany to default, in order to find excuse for keeping her permanently crippled. But French public opinion, that supplied the real driving force to M. Poincaré's policy, was neither so subtle nor so cynical. It was an emotional urge, of obsessive force, that drove forward the French armies into Germany's richest industrial district. The long agony of the invasion of France and the occupation of her territory had engendered an almost agonizing desire to execute the like, and more also, upon the invader. The Germans, by throwing down their arms with their territory still inviolate, had acted in the same way as the machine gunner who, after mowing down swathes of attackers, demands quarter from their surviving comrades. Let the armies go forward and show the Teuton that invasion is a game that two can play! Let him take his turn at biting the dust of humiliation! Why should Krupp's escape the lot of Lens and Lille? If M. Poincaré had not existed, it would have been necessary to find his equivalent to fill a void in the French soul.

Certainly the lawyer from Lorraine was the man for the business. He could hardly even wait for a decent excuse. An alleged technical default was enough to justify him in abandoning the last pretence of legality, even as established at Versailles, and deciding, in effect, that the War must be renewed—this time against an opponent who had neither the will nor the capacity to take the field. There were other objects to be gained besides Reparations and Ruhr coal. The Rhine line, which France had been duped by false promises into renouncing at Versailles, might yet be secured, if by force or fraud the Rhineland could be detached from the Reich, and made independent under French protection. The experiment would, at any rate, be tried for all it was worth.

Here was a dilemma for Britain, whose armies had their post on the Rhine, alongside those of France

and Belgium, and whose moral position was compromised by the fact that Mr. Lloyd George had, on a previous occasion, joined with France in threatening this very invasion of the Ruhr. Mr. Bonar Law crossed the Channel just before the New Year in a vain attempt to induce M. Poincaré to listen to reason, and allow Germany breathing space to restore her hopelessly shattered credit, before pressing her for payments that she was obviously incapable, for the present, of making. But he might as well have talked to the Channel itself as to M. Poincaré. All he could do was to dissociate his country from a line of action which he truly predicted would not only fail, but have disastrous effects on the economic situation in Europe. Hardly had he left Paris, than the French troops were on the march, and the grimmest, if not the bloodiest, phase of the struggle between Gaul and Teuton commenced.

It does not fall within our scope to record it in detail. The German nation, unarmed, but driven desperate by this crowning outrage, was determined to suffer any violence rather than submit. Poincaré was equally determined to use any violence to extort submission. Week by week, month by month, fresh turns were given to the screw, and still the Germans in the Ruhr doggedly refused to recognize the invaders, or do a stroke of work for them, and still they were supported in their refusal by the rest of Germany.

Reparation payments ceased, and such deliveries in kind as the French managed to seize were insignificant. But the strain of passive resistance completed the ruin of Germany. Everybody's savings, even the money in their purses, turned to waste paper. Misery stalked the land; the plight of the once prosperous middle class beggared description. Many sought relief in suicide. Deep in the German soul was planted an undying hatred for the authors of this humiliation, a vindictive and bitter Nationalism, that was sooner or later bound to come to its own and

replace the peaceful but impotent régime of the new-born Republic.

M. Poincaré, by way of making his country safe, had sowed dragon's teeth that would in due time spring up as armies more terrible than those of the Kaiser had ever been. Only he could have rendered inevitable the triumph of Nazism.

Until the French fury had exhausted itself, there was but one thing that England could helpfully do, which was to keep her head and her temper. This was not easy. *Entente Cordiale* had given place, for the time, to what the French Press christened *Rupture Cordiale*. M. Poincaré, who had none of the traditional French urbanity, made no secret of his contempt for British scruples. The position of the English garrison on the Rhine was far from easy, and the French spared no effort to make it as difficult as possible. It would have been a tempting gesture for England to have followed the American example and eased her hands of the whole business by withdrawing her troops. Unfortunately this would have exactly suited M. Poincaré's book, by handing over the Germans in the British area to his tender mercies, and it would have destroyed any hope of reviving the old *Entente* once the fury had passed. On the other side, the *Hatmsworth Press* was howling with delight at the spectacle of Jerry catching it, and its slogan was *Hats off to M. Poincaré*. Under the circumstances, the attitude of the British Government in standing protestingly aside, more in sorrow than in anger, from its late ally's proceedings, must be judged the wisest possible. But whether the "dry, sterile thunder"—as Mr. Eliot might have put it—of Curzon's repeated diplomatic indictments of French policy, was equally wise, is at least disputable.

By September, the agony of Germany had become too great to be endured, and M. Poincaré did achieve his object of forcing her government to the formal surrender for which he had stood out with the uncompromising sternness proper to his rôle of strong

man. But it was a worse than Pyrrhic victory. As a business proposition the occupation of the Ruhr had been a dead loss, and the French appetite for glory was beginning to cloy of the satisfaction of kicking a body that had now ceased even passively to resist. It was no good running hands through the victim's pockets—they were empty. Even the expedient of putting up a handful of doubtful characters to constitute themselves the government of an independent Rhineland, only redounded to the disgrace of its promoters. The Ruhr may have been a crippling loss to Germany—to France it was proving a white elephant. And with the coming of another year alarming symptoms began to develop in France itself. There had been a grim satisfaction, to those who remembered the fate of the invaded provinces, in watching the collapse of the Mark, with its attendant miseries. But now the Franc began to show symptoms of having caught the same infection. It began to slump, and the French rentier found the value of his already diminished savings shrinking with ominous rapidity. Who could tell where the process would stop? Glory and the strong hand would be a poor substitute for the next meal.

In May, 1924, came the elections to the French Chamber, and the result proved to be a vote of unmistakable no confidence in M. Poincaré. It was the real end of the War, so far as France was concerned. Her will to victory was exhausted by experience of its firstfruits. But they who sow dragon's teeth must abide the full harvest, in its season.



## CHAPTER III

### MR. BALDWIN'S FIRST PREMIERSHIP

Sir Archibald Salvidge, the leader of the Liverpool Conservatives, had remarked, at the end of 1922, that if Bonar Law's health were to break down, it would be difficult to imagine what would become of the Cabinet.<sup>1</sup> Before the end of the ensuing May this very catastrophe had materialized. Death, in its most terrible form, had the Premier by the throat, and it was impossible for him any longer to remain at the post of duty. The Cabinet of obscure men had lost the leader whose prestige and personality had been its chief support. Who could be found to take his place?

The man who seemed marked for the post was the one elder statesman left in the Cabinet, Lord Curzon, with his great gifts and distinguished record. He himself had looked forward to this as the crown of his career, and had come up to London imagining the whole thing to be a foregone conclusion. But there was one objection to Curzon that no one could have explained to him. As a personality, he was impossible. His formal grandiloquence might not have been out of place beneath a periwig in the reign of the First George, but in that of the Fifth it was a palpable anachronism, and of this no one was better aware than George V himself. A Curzon Government could never have won the favour of a democratic electorate, that insists on humanizing its leaders. Not even the Press could have dissociated the name of George Nathaniel Curzon from the jingling refrain of

I am a most superior person.

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<sup>1</sup> *Salvidge of Liverpool*, by Stanley Salvidge, p. 520.

So it was discovered, at the last moment, that it was no longer desirable to have a Premier who was also a peer. This left only one man in the field, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, who, but a few months ago, had hardly been known by name to the ordinary newspaper reader, but who was now in the public eye as the man who had settled the American debt. He at least had the advantage of being easily humanizable. That from early childhood he had been a lover of books; that his family was steeped in the tradition of Pre-Raphælite culture; that his most casual pronouncements were apt to be gems of English prose style—these were facts best kept in the background. What did count with the man in the street was that Mr. Baldwin loved pigs—a weakness that had imparted human interest to so unpromising a subject as the late Duke of Devonshire—and, above all, that he smoked a pipe, a pipe that became as inevitably associated with him, in the popular imagination, as the grid with Saint Lawrence and his bowler hat with Mr. Chaplin. It was his bond of union with the Little Man. Who could visualize Curzon, with a pipe in his mouth, leaning in blissful contemplation over the door of a sty?

Such was the personality that formed the publicity value of the new Premier. What manner of man he really was, time would reveal. For Mr. Baldwin was not merely the easy-going, soil-rooted Saxon, who thanked God in public that he was not brilliant. He had Puritan as well as literary antecedents. Beneath the unpretentious exterior, there was a strain of uncompromising righteousness, a moral intransigence, that had already revealed itself at the Carlton House meeting and over that matter of the American debt. It was a most unmodern complex, this of "Do right though the heavens fall," one calculated to bring on its possessor's head the fury of those who owned very different principles.

To poor Curzon, waiting for his summons to Buckingham Palace, the news that Mr. Baldwin was

already there came as a stunning, perhaps as a mortal blow. "A man of no experience," he faltered between his tears, "and of the utmost insignificance—of the utmost insignificance!"<sup>1</sup> But he faced up to the catastrophe in the spirit of a great gentleman. He congratulated his supplanter with generous warmth; he proposed his election to the leadership of the Party; he carried on with his duties at the Foreign Office till the fall of the Ministry. He had less than two years to live.

Mr. Baldwin was now in the saddle, after a rise from obscurity to supreme power whose swiftness it would be hard to parallel in Parliamentary history. He had every prospect of remaining Premier for at least another four years. He had an unshakable majority. In its quiet way the Government was not doing too badly. The figures for unemployment continued to fall—for May they were 1,221,000 as contrasted with 1,485,000 in January, and were not far short of a million below the peak figure of 1921. The cost of living also continued steadily to decline; taxation had been lightened. Since the first shocks that the Government had sustained, there had been no signs of any particular discontent in the country, and the eternal Housing problem had been tackled with ability by the one member of the new team who showed unmistakable signs of rising above second-eleven standard—Mr. Neville Chamberlain, the younger brother of Mr. Austen Chamberlain. There seemed every reason for sticking to Mr. Bonar Law's policy of quiet government and sound finance. It is safe to say that any ordinary man, in Mr. Baldwin's shoes, would have thanked God for favours received, and settled down quietly to enjoy the sweets of power. And Mr. Baldwin stood in the public eye as the type of the supremely ordinary man. It was the impression that, with a most consummate art, he aimed at creating. It is more than probable that he himself believed in its fidelity to fact.

<sup>1</sup> *Career of the Last Phase*, by Harold Nicolson, p. 355.

At first it seemed as if he were determined to act up to expectations. There was talk of bringing Mr. Reginald McKenna, who had earned golden opinions at the Exchequer during the War, back to his old post to replace the Premier, a step that would have had the effect of dissociating the Government from any urgent hankerings after the full Protectionist policy from which Mr. Bonat Law's pledge had debarred it during the lifetime of that Parliament. But the project failed to materialize, and Mr. Baldwin finally made the only possible alternative choice, by handing over the Exchequer to Mr. Neville Chamberlain, to whom his father's Protectionist principles were a sacred heritage.

There was no reason, however, to think that the appointment to the key post of the Government of its ablest financier, signified any intention, on Mr. Baldwin's part, to depart from the accepted principles of party strategy, and imperil not only his majority but his newly attained Premiership. To carry on quietly was by all personal and political calculations, the obvious thing. Yes, but was it the right thing? That was a question that would not have troubled many politicians. It is difficult to imagine it having troubled Mr. Lloyd George before his appeal to the country in 1918.

Here was Mr. Baldwin, by no contrivance of his own, made responsible for his country's destinies at a most critical period of her history—a fearful responsibility. And he was confronted with the new and alarming phenomenon of the twelve-hundred-thousand unemployed. It is true that the figures had fallen in the last two years enough to make any ordinary man echo those words of Admiral Hotham, who had driven Nelson almost to despair by remarking—"We must be contented. We have done very well." But with the curve flattening out at well over the million mark, Mr. Baldwin could not be contented. As an employer, in something of the old semi-patriarchal tradition, he knew what unemployment meant.

Was he doing his best, the best possible, for these men? Was he free to do it?

He believed that there was a remedy, a double remedy, which, if it would not cure the disease altogether, at least offered the prospect of better results than any that had been tried hitherto. It was not original; it had been the faith of the Conservative Party for a score of years, the faith in which Mr. Baldwin had fought his first constituency in 1906, and to which he had held ever since. The circumstances of the Post-war epoch, so far from putting it out of date, had provided additional support for it. The foreign market was becoming more and more closed to British goods, by the competitive Nationalism that was impelling every nation, by means of tariffs, to constitute itself a self-contained and jealously exclusive economic unit. But there were two markets whose possibilities were still capable of development, that of the home country itself, by a system of protective import duties, and of the Dominions, by one of preferential tariffs. At the Imperial Conference in the Autumn, the Dominion Premiers had again showed their eagerness for such an arrangement, and one of them, Mr. Bruce of Australia, had gone so far as to warn the Home Government that his country could not go on indefinitely giving a preference on British manufactured goods, if it got nothing in return. But the British Ministers, though convinced and willing, were debarred by Mr. Bonar Law's pledge from offering more than a few insignificant concessions.

It was immediately after this that Mr. Baldwin made his great decision. So convinced was he that the way of Protection and Preference offered the true solution of the unemployment problem, that he decided to put his safe majority and his newly acquired greatness to the hazard of a general election, in order to get his release from Mr. Bonar Law's pledge. He first announced his intention in a speech at Plymouth on October 25, and from that point events moved

with headlong rapidity. Parliament was called together on the 13th of November only to be dissolved on the 16th, and the polling day was fixed for December 6th.

As Parliamentary tactics, this was inviting trouble. The Protectionist lead had been fatal for the Conservatives in the past. *The industrial North, and especially Lancashire*, had shown an invincible bias against it, and there was no reason to think that its mind had been altered. The opponents of the Government had a cause that they could fight with red-hot enthusiasm. The Labour Party, though one would hardly have expected the Trade Unions to have objected on principle to Protective methods, declared uncompromisingly for the bourgeois gospel of Cobden. Even the moribund Liberal Party was galvanized, by the threat to its sacred dogma of Free Trade, into some semblance of its old vitality. Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George managed to mask their mutual aversion sufficiently to achieve the formal reunion of their two factions, though Mr. Lloyd George took care to keep a tight hand on the political fund he had accumulated as Premier.

Mr. Baldwin had presented his enemies with a better fighting cause than that with which he had provided his own followers, for he qualified his Protectionist programme by pledging himself to put no tax on essential foodstuffs, which were the very things on which *the Dominions* wanted a preference, and whose omission cut off the agricultural interest from the main benefits of his scheme. How far this was due to Mr. Baldwin's own choice, and how far to the necessity of compromising with members of his Cabinet, it is impossible to say. An English Premier is no dictator, even in his own party.

A crowning misfortune was the defection of the millionaire-controlled stunt Press, whose bosses had been the foremost advocates of Protection, but who had already commenced that vendetta against Mr. Baldwin and all his works that was their consistent

method of honouring independence of mind and principle in any public man. To do them justice, these noblemen were genuinely incapable of appreciating the Premier's motives or even his sanity. A man who had thrown the best part of his private fortune down the drain and could not stick to power even when it fell into his hands! What else could he be than mad?

"If Fleet Street had been consulted," says Lord Beaverbrook, "there would have been no defeat at all."<sup>1</sup> That is profoundly true. And it was Mr. Baldwin's neglect to consult Fleet Street on this, or any other occasion, that constituted his unforgiveable offence. It was not that loud, large voice that guided his decisions.

And yet, if Mr. Baldwin had been a Machiavelli, a far-sighted egotism might have impelled him to a gamble in which, as the sequel proved, he stood to win either way. The most fatal mistake he could have made would have been to cling placidly to office with a scratched-up Cabinet that, like Mr. Balfour's not altogether dissimilar combination in the early nineteenth-hundreds, was incapable of commanding respect, and could only have drifted on to a ruin that would have engulfed its leader, and much else besides. Mr. Baldwin himself never claimed to have acted on any more subtle calculation than that implied in the proverb, "Honesty is the best policy."

No doubt he hoped and expected that honesty would have its immediate reward. The Conservatives were complacently optimistic up to the very eve of the polls, the worst that they feared being a reduced majority. But the first returns showed how badly they had miscalculated. Lancashire and the North proved as firm as ever for Free Trade. Well before midnight, the returns from the boroughs showed that Mr. Bonar Law's majority had been gambled away. It became apparent on the morrow that serious inroads had been made on the allegiance even of the counties. *Liberal*

<sup>1</sup> *Politicians and the Press*, p. 76.

candidates had captured such safe constituencies as those of *Hemel Hempstead* in Hertfordshire and *Seven-oaks* in Kent. The final returns showed a net loss of 88 seats to the Conservatives, leaving them, with a membership of 258, still the largest party in the House, but in a minority to the combined forces of 191 Socialists and 158 Liberals.

This result was so unexpected in any quarter, that the first reaction to it was one of general bewilderment. The *Harmsworth Press*, that had contributed to it in no small degree, was now in strident panic at the prospect of a Socialist administration, and calling for the two older parties to combine to prevent such a catastrophe. Such an apparent conspiracy of the possessing classes would have been the surest way of conferring not only office, but power, on the Socialists as soon as the unnatural alliance collapsed. But the Liberals, infuriated by the attack on Free Trade, and inspired by a long tradition of hostility to Toryism, had no idea of making terms with their old enemies. No sooner had the new Parliament met, than they joined with Labour to turn Mr. Baldwin out. The King had no choice, after this, but to send for Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the Labour leader, and ask him to form a Government. It was an invitation as impossible to refuse as it was perilous to accept. A *Punch* cartoon showed Mr. Baldwin mounting the steps to the guillotine with Mr. MacDonald as executioner. A more subtle rendering might have reversed the parts.



## CHAPTER IV

### LABOUR IN OFFICE

The thing that the possessing classes had so greatly feared had come upon them with that suddenness that seemed to be characteristic of major events in the Post-war epoch. A Socialist Government was in office. The army, the police, the Government departments, were in the hands of men whose principles were avowedly those of social revolution, and the first plank in whose programme was a confiscatory raid on capital. People whose flesh had been made to creep by the *Morning Post* and *Daily Mail* were ready to believe that Mr. Asquith, by conniving at Mr. Baldwin's downfall, had thrown open the door to all the horrors of Bolshevism.

Had Colonel Mistrust and Lady Timorous been capable of thinking for themselves, they might have taken to heart the consolation vouchsafed to Christian—"Fear not the lions, for they are chained." For nobody knew better than the hardbitten old Yorkshire lawyer that he and his Liberals, by holding the balance of votes in the House, held the new rulers at their mercy. With more truth than tact he proclaimed that Labour must eat out of the Liberal hand. And as if this was not enough, the established order had a second line of defence in the House of Lords, in which Labour was practically unrepresented.

The task before the new Premier, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, was, in fact, about as difficult and thankless as could well be imagined. While it had been in Opposition, the Labour Party's chief asset had consisted in the boundless expectations that it had

aroused. It was going to make all things new, to create a *new social order* in which there should be work and opportunity for all ; to abolish the Capitalist System, whatever that might be ; to use the wealth of those who lived on dividends to provide all sorts of benefits for those who lived on wages. When it got into office, it would be expected to deliver the goods, and it would be no use explaining that even if there were any goods to deliver, the least attempt to do so would result in its being turned neck and crop out of office. To the hungry working-class elector, the proof of the pudding is the eating, and the serving up of an empty dish would inspire him with a certain scepticism about promises of meals in the future.

There was, however, one advantage that the possession of office, even without power, had conferred on Labour, and that a bold, political strategy would have utilized for all it was worth. It was that of the initiative. Even if it could not carry its measures, it was free to bring them forward, and put upon the older parties the onus of throwing them out. It could then go to the electorate on the direct issue of the poor man's claims against the rich man's selfishness ; it could say in effect—"Here is your pudding, piping hot upon the table, and if you want to sit down to the meal, you have only to signify your willingness by marking a cross on a ballot paper. Mr. Lloyd George, with his People's Budget of 1909, had showed how effectively this game could be played. Another People's Budget, taking the form of an enormous bribe, an offer to distribute among the many the worldly possessions of the few, might have been deemed an unscrupulous weapon, but only on the assumption that the Labour prospectus had been fraudulent. Unscrupulous or not, it might easily have done the business. Even if it had failed, Labour would have retained all the glamour and prestige of its great expectations. The reproach of "*no pudding*" would have been on its supplanters.

Circumstances dictated one motto, and one only, to Mr. MacDonald and his colleagues—that of an earlier revolutionary: "*L'audace ! et encore l'audace ! et toujours l'audace !*" That is to say, if they sincerely believed in their promises of the platform, and desired to implement their Socialist faith at the earliest possible moment.

In the light of subsequent events, the mere suggestion has the appearance of irony. The Labour leaders were no band of united enthusiasts, inspired by a fanatical determination to make a new heaven and a new earth. Many of them had grown old and hard-bitten in the grind of Trades Union politics, and very humanly desired time to make good in these new jobs that now formed the crown of so much patient endeavour.

Lacking as they were in ministerial experience, they were naturally even more dependent than their predecessors on the good offices of their permanent staffs, who, with all their tradition of impartiality, were hardly cut out for the abettors of revolution. The Cabinet as a whole was a conjunction of the most diverse elements, including, as it did, dignified make-weights like Lord Haldane and Lord Chelmsford, who were attached to Labour without being of it, and Mr. Wheatley, the picked champion of the Clyde-side Group of revolutionary extremists.

Mr. MacDonald himself, the architect of the Labour Party, was perhaps the only man who, by sheer force of personality, was capable of driving such a team. He was one who, by taking the most unpopular line during the War, had shown himself possessed in the highest degree of that unflinching moral independence that the discipline of Calvinism has implanted in the Scottish nature. It was accompanied by the capacity of taking himself and his mission with a seriousness unqualified by doubt or humour, the real last infirmity of such noble natures as Milton's, and John Knox's. One secret of the compelling force of Mr. MacDonald's oratory was the impression he seldom failed to

convey of being slightly inspired. He spoke, as from the pulpit, with authority. To cross him was the sin of blasphemy. And at the same time he was versed in all the subtleties of the politician's technique. Neither Gladstone nor Asquith had possessed to a greater degree the art of using impressive phrases without ever nailing themselves down, irrevocably, to one definite meaning. The combination of such *moral and intellectual qualities can hardly fail to give* their possessor a rare power, for good or ill, over men in the mass.

But they are not without certain accompanying defects, even from the politician's standpoint. Mr. MacDonald was the strangest possible leader for the party of extreme democracy. His aloof and aristocratic bearing contrasted oddly with the pipe-smoking bonhomie and humorous self-depreciation of Mr. Baldwin. He could dominate his colleagues more easily than he could capture their sympathies. He was above them, not of them. His vein of sensitive pride made it hard for him to come to a working compromise with the leaders of the rival parties, a serious disability, at this juncture, for unless he wished deliberately to ride for a fall, it was all-important for him to secure at least the benevolent neutrality of the Liberals. But that phrase about eating out of the Liberal hand was not one that his Scottish pride was likely to forgive or forget. And he spared no pains to show his contemptuous disregard for Liberal wishes and susceptibilities. Let them drive him to the country if they dared, but he would not be beholden to them for anything!

At the same time, it was not in his cautious nature to go all out for the full Socialist programme and damn the consequences. A decisive bar to this would have been the fact that his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Philip Snowden, was, in all but name, the last and most unbending of the old-fashioned Radical Free Traders, a financier of Gladstonian soundness, who, so far from being disturbed by the

obvious impossibility of forcing a capital levy upon an unwilling Parliament, was, along with most of his colleagues, thoroughly convinced of its impracticability, and glad of any excuse for shelving it.<sup>1</sup>

It was, then, decided that it should be the cue of the Labour Government to adapt itself to its limitations, and, by quiet and sound work, to convince the country of its fitness for office. This was to forfeit prestige and initiative, and to put itself at the mercy of rivals that it made no attempt to conciliate.

After a very short time, it became apparent that the Red Revolution was at least postponed. Things appeared to go on, under the new regime, in much the same way as they had under the old. There was even a disposition to treat this new Government of the horny handed as the latest thing in thrills. The spectacle of ex-workmen being appointed to the highest offices of state and received at court, of His Majesty's condescension in receiving them and the sartorial laxities he was pleased to allow, provided as much simple amusement as a servants' ball in the drawing-room, with the saving assurance that if the butler were to show the effects of drink or the cook to give herself airs, the whole lot could be sent packing to the lower regions at a moment's notice. Those who had been worked up to hysterical panic at the prospect of Labour in office, were switched round by their Press mentors to a mood of equally unreflecting complacency. The peaceable demeanour of the chained lions was taken as proof that even if one of them ever got loose, he would turn out to be no more than *Snug the joiner*, a very gentle beast, and of a good conscience, for all his rough roaring to the gallery.

Not only the prospective victims of Labour, but also its prospective beneficiaries, were being driven by force of circumstances to revise their views. It soon became apparent that the Government was no nearer to a solution of the pressing domestic problems with

<sup>1</sup> Viscount Snowden's *Autobiography*, p. 195.

which it was confronted, than its Capitalist predecessors had been. This might or might not be due to the fact that it was debarred from applying any of the major remedies that it had recommended in Opposition. But the fact itself was glaring, and it was rubbed in by the hasty and all too candid admission of the new Minister for Labour, that he could not produce schemes for the relief of unemployment like rabbits out of a hat. Unfortunately Labour, when out of office, had spared no pains to create the impression that its hat contained a whole warren of rabbits that it could produce the moment it was allowed to mount the platform.

Nevertheless, those tendencies that are beyond the control of Governments, but so largely determine their fate, started by working in Labour's favour. The fall in unemployment, that had been going on steadily since the summer of 1921, continued during the first months of 1924, until in May the figure had fallen to not much over a million. But after that the curve began to rise again, until, by September, most of the ground gained in the Spring had been lost.

In dealing with the other key problem, that of Housing, the Clydeside Minister of Health, Mr. Wheatley, did certainly begin by giving the House a taste of some properly revolutionary legislation. He brought forward, with a great flourish of Socialist trumpets, a measure the effect of which was to authorize any unemployed man who was not in a position to pay his rent, to live free in his lodging at the expense of his landlord. This barefaced attempt to relieve Peter by robbing Paul, which the stunt Press not inaptly christened the *Cuckoo Bill*, was, after suffering a good deal of rough handling, thrown out altogether, and replaced by a measure introduced by a Liberal Private Member.

After the Government had stomached this public humiliation, Mr. Wheatley changed his tactics, and proceeded to deal, on lines of studied moderation, with the perennial problem of getting houses put

up that workmen could afford to live in. His Bill, the only important piece of domestic legislation undertaken by Mr. MacDonald's first Government, was, in effect, supplementary to one introduced the year before by Mr. Neville Chamberlain, that had already produced excellent results by subsidizing builders of working-class houses. Mr. Wheatley, while leaving Mr. Chamberlain's scheme substantially intact, proposed an alternative by which the subsidy would be increased for the building of houses, covenanted to be let at rents below a certain specified figure. Mr. Wheatley, who piloted through the measure with a *tactful geniality* that contrasted strangely with his Clydeside heroics, made a useful, though in no sense a revolutionary, addition to the work of his predecessors, and the two schemes ran concurrently for the next few years, Mr. Chamberlain's proving more popular with private builders, and Mr. Wheatley's with Local Authorities.<sup>1</sup>

Some concessions to the unemployed the Government did manage to effect, by extending the benefits and easing the conditions of Unemployment Insurance, and at the same time undermining its financial basis, so that the Dole tended to become more and more frankly a form of State charity, that might perhaps be justified on moral grounds, but hardly on those business principles that govern the operations of reputable Insurance companies.

Paradoxically enough, the most conspicuous success of Labour in the domestic sphere was constituted by Mr. Snowden's Budget, which had not the least suspicion of Socialism about it, but was framed on lines of such strict Liberal orthodoxy that it might have been inspired by the spirit of Gladstone himself. Mr. Snowden was fortunate in being left a handsome surplus, and he proceeded to dispose of this in a way that only the most embittered reactionary could stigmatize as class-biased. The astonished Capitalist, so

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent summary, see the article on Housing in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 14th edn.

far from finding himself skinned to the bone, was relieved altogether of the Corporation Profits Tax—already halved by Mr. Baldwin—and of a niggling but irritating impost on inhabited houses. The ideal of the Free Breakfast Table, which had been that of the Victorian Radicals, was honoured by drastic reductions in the duties on tea, sugar, and coffee.

So firmly, in fact, was the new Chancellor wedded to the uttermost letter of the Free Trade dogma, that he went out of his way to deprive the Exchequer of a sum amounting in a full year to 2½ millions, that it had received from certain duties originally imposed by Mr. McKenna, during the War, on motor-cars and a few other manufactured articles. The sole plausible argument for throwing this money down the drain—and incidentally making Coventry, with its motor works, a safe Conservative seat for the next election—was based in no way on any real or even supposed material advantages to be derived, but on the election having been fought on the Free Trade issue, and the consequent duty of the victors to root out, with inquisitorial thoroughness, the last lingering traces of Protectionist heresy. It goes without saying that he made a clean sweep of the trifling preferences that the last Government had arranged to concede to the Dominions and Colonies. Here, at least, he could count on the support of the Liberals.

But it was not to round off the work of Cobden that the Labour Party had been formed.



## CHAPTER V

### THE CREDITOR PAYS

From whatever cause, the domestic record of the first Labour Government must have been as great a disappointment to its supporters as it was a relief to its opponents. Its most unequivocal success was in the last field in which such a Government had ever been expected to distinguish itself, that of Foreign Policy. Mr. MacDonald, with a true sense of his own strongest line, but with too little regard for his frail constitution, followed Lord Salisbury's example in being his own Foreign Secretary. It was not long before the force of his personality began to be felt, throughout the Chancelleries of Europe, as that of Lord Curzon had never been. In his dealings with foreign statesmen he displayed a power of conciliation that was by no means always so conspicuous in his handling of opposition at home.

Like Mr. Baldwin before him, he went as far as any man could towards mollifying the hedgehog-like disposition of M. Poincaré, who, having vindicated himself victoriously as the strong man, was a little more inclined to consider his Ruhr venture from a business point of view.

It was high time, for the very success of the invasion had only served to make it clear that violence could no more be relied upon to extract Reparations, than an enraged man's efforts to force a recalcitrant slot machine to produce cigarettes. It was not only France that stood to lose. The whole structure of international, or at any rate, of inter-allied finance, was based on the assumption that it was possible to

make Germany responsible for squaring the accounts of her victors. The real dominating facts of the situation were that America, the paymaster of the War, insisted on being paid back, and that unless this could be done by making Germany the paymaster of the Peace, the European victors would have to choose between crushing themselves beneath the burden they had failed to impose on the vanquished, and—though the word was never breathed—repudiating it altogether.

The time was obviously past for gloating over astronomical figures of payments that were never likely to materialize. It was a poor satisfaction, when German payments dried up or came in insignificant dribblets, to think of those thousands of millions to whose payment German representatives had, under duress, been made to pledge their signatures. The situation was hardest of all for France, in spite of her laurels of victory and her momentarily irresistible armies. Her whole system of finance had depended on her success in extracting Reparations. She had spent enormous sums in restoring her devastated areas, she had freely unbalanced her budgets, on the faith of the gold that was to cross the Rhine. And now that the gold had proved to be fairy gold, that vanished in the night, all her calculations were upset. She was sliding faster and faster down the slippery slope towards the same bankruptcy that had overwhelmed her enemy.

Moreover, the failure of her attempt to set up a Rhineland Protectorate had left an even worse fear gnawing at the heart of France. There was now no question of her permanently maintaining her watch on the Rhine, from Holland to Switzerland. Her flank in Alsace-Lorraine was bound to be exposed in the future, as it had been in 1870, to envelopment from the North. And some—perhaps not very distant—day, the dragon's teeth she had sowed would bear fruit, and she would have to face another German invasion, against enormous odds of resources

and population. She had now sinned against her neighbour beyond all possibility of forgiveness—and Germany had a tradition of revival.

There was only one thing to be done, and that was to find some means of stabilizing the situation, military and financial, for as long as possible. If Germany could at least be got to advance enough to keep France from financial collapse, and, at the same time, kept within the military limits prescribed for her at Versailles, the great fear might yet be prevented from materializing.

It is therefore not surprising that in the Autumn of 1923, even M. Poincaré's administration should have consented to the setting up of a committee to enquire into the actual facts of Germany's capacity for payment, and of the ways and means by which such payments might be effected. This committee of experts, appointed by the Powers chiefly interested, was presided over by an American banker, General Dawes.

*This reappearance of America on the European scene is a matter of no small significance.* She had ostentatiously resolved to withdraw herself altogether from the affairs and complications of her late allies. But the American is nothing if not a business man, and his interest in this matter of Reparations was only second to that of France herself. In theory, of course, he had only to sit still and collect his debts. His new President, Calvin Coolidge, had professed to dispose of the whole matter in a sentence, "They hired the money, didn't they?" and honest Mr. Baldwin would have answered, "Yes, of course we did."

But there was another point of view, which was expressed, with admirable lucidity, to the present author, by an Italian man of letters whose acquaintance he had the honour of making about this time.

"You English seem to us to be quite mad, paying *your* debt to America. You will see how much of *our* debt we shall pay to either of you. As if"—

this with a comprehensive wave of the hand—"any ally would be so ungentlemanly as to press for the payment of a debt contracted under such circumstances!"

It sounded terribly immoral at the time, but it did certainly represent the almost unanimous sentiment among the Latin Allies—and could even Mr. Coolidge carry his faith in John Bull so far as to believe in his heart of hearts that his willingness to pay would survive realization that he, and he alone, would be required to impoverish himself, to the second and third generation, by assuming obligations unsupportable even by the vanquished Hun—and all as a reward for his having taken his place in the fighting line in the first week, instead of the last year of the War? A bargain is a bargain, under whatever circumstances it may have been contracted, but in this imperfect world one has to take human nature for what it is, and not what one would like it to be.

So that to devise some effective means of payment was a vital American interest, if the simple solution of cancelling the debts altogether was to be ruled out. It is arguable that the most businesslike solution would have been the Christian one, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors", an agreement to cut losses all round and start with a clean sheet. It would undoubtedly, as some latter-day Mahomet might have put it to each of the nations in turn, not excluding France and America, "*be better for you*".

But that again had to be ruled out by the basic facts of human nature, as it was in the Post-war era, when normalcy was egotism, and egotism, as always, near-sighted. Uncle Sam was as human as John Bull, and he did not see why, standing at the creditor terminus of the pay-line, he should be expected to sacrifice something for nothing. And so he, along with the others, hit upon a very ingenious solution of the difficulty—the only solution under the circumstances. The line should be bent into a circle. Granted that Germany could not, out of her own

shattered resources, advance the Allies the where-withal to pay their debt to America, what was there there to prevent America, with a certain amount of assistance from Britain, from advancing the money herself? After all, no landlord ever need go without his rent if he takes the precaution of advancing the equivalent as a loan each quarter-day.

This, which was, in effect, the solution proposed by the Dawes Committee, was, from everyone's standpoint, an inspiration. Even the poor, downtrodden German began to see a ray of hope. Pauper as he was, and bankrupt, he would now be able to draw on Uncle Sam's bottomless purse to put himself on his feet again, to stock himself with raw materials and up-to-date machinery, and again compete with his rivals—not excluding America—in the markets of the world. No matter where the means came from, or on what terms it was supplied, it would be sufficient for the day if the smoke of Essen and Elberfeld went up to heaven as of old, and the blue ribbon of the Atlantic came back to Hamburg.

For France it would also be sufficient, for the day, if Germany could be made to pay up, by any means whatever, not the fantastic indemnities stipulated for at Spa and the other Conferences, but enough to enable France to balance her own budgets, and make some show of honouring her obligations to America. Also, if Germany could be kept busy and contented, and at the same time in a position of complete financial dependence, she would be less likely to turn her thoughts to schemes of revenge.

As for John Bull, he would be content enough with a working arrangement that would enable him to balance his credit and debit accounts with foreign nations at the end of each year.

And finally for America, the scheme offered dazzling possibilities. It would have the effect of putting Germany in a position of economic dependence such as had only fallen to the lot of definitely backward nations in the days of the Imperialist competition

before the War. She would—and in fact did—become a gigantic field for the exploitation of American capital. American money would ensure American control of her leading industrial and commercial undertakings. She would labour and create in order to pour, through an invisible pipe, a perpetual flow of usury in return for the capital so kindly advanced. Mr. Babbitt, of Main Street, Zenith, would always know where to go for a handsome 6 or 7 or even more per cent on his dollars.

It was a magnificent scheme, and amounted to a solution of the world's economic difficulties by the setting up of a vast, perpetual-motion machine. Let A lend G the money to pay E and F who owe it to A, and as long as the arrangement lasts, everybody will be happy. Nor is it absolutely certain that, in theory, such an equilibrium might not be indefinitely prolonged. The laws of mechanics do not necessarily hold in the economic sphere. A better analogy might be that of the circulation of the blood, which is—at least so long as life lasts—a case of perpetual motion in biology. One might think of America as of a vast heart, pumping out the life-blood of the economic organism and receiving it again.

But there is this about the circulation of blood. The flow must be continuous and uninterrupted. Let there be any sort of stoppage, and above all, let the heart cease pumping blood even for a few seconds, and the result is the collapse of the whole organism. If we could imagine a body in which the arteries and veins are constricted and blocked at all sorts of arbitrary points, we might judge what sort of a chance such a system would have of working. Above all, in the human body, the flow of blood is most delicately regulated. There is a normal of the pulse as well as of the temperature. If the heart were to start *pumping blood with uncontrolled violence at a pace bearing no relation to the requirements or capacities of the organism*, we know what the result would be. And to trust to the cupidity and optimism of Ameri-

can financiers and German *entrepreneurs* to keep the circular flow regulated so as to preserve an even and exact mean between fever and anæmia, was a little too much to expect of that same human nature but for whose imperfections there would have been no need for the scheme at all.

We have anticipated matters a little, in order to bring out clearly what was the real inwardness of this new plan of stabilization that was destined to replace the camouflaged, and finally the naked violence, by which it had been sought to force the Versailles Treaty down Germany's throat. But it was not to be expected that the Dawes Committee could be as candid as all this. Very sensibly it confined its report, which it accomplished with admirable expedition by April, 1924, to the bare business details of collecting from Germany such contribution as she would be able to make towards repairing the damage of the War. With politics it only concerned itself so far as to stipulate that Germany's economic life should be left free and undivided, except for the restrictions imposed in the scheme itself. Following the precedent of Versailles, the Committee did not even attempt to fix the total amount of the debt, but only the rate of annual payments, which was to rise in the fifth year to a standard of £125 millions, a figure which could even be exceeded if German prosperity allowed of it.

Elaborate arrangements were made for carrying this into effect. The sources of payment were earmarked out of taxation, the profits of railways, and those of industry. Over these sources Germany's creditors were to be allowed a controlling influence, as well as over a Bank of Issue, to be set up for receiving payments and stabilizing currency. The effect of the scheme would be to constitute Germany the milch-cow of the Allies, to be looked after and fatted up on scientific and humane principles, so as to afford the maximum yield. Above all, a loan was to be provided—the Dawes Loan as it was eventually

named—of £40 millions, for putting Germany on her economic feet again. And this represented but a small proportion of the capital that was to be pumped into her system, principally from American sources, in the course of the next few years.

Whatever else might be said for or against this scheme, it would at any rate be an acceptable substitute for the chaos created by the French invasion of Germany. And to get it accepted was the chief aim of Mr. MacDonald's diplomacy. For, though the Dawes experts had been too tactful to put it down in black and white, it was obvious that its successful working was quite inconsistent with the presence of the French troops in the Ruhr. It was too much to expect of British and American investors that they should take up a loan to a country with this strangle grip on its throat. It must be off with the old before it could be on with the new. And this meant a tacit but public acknowledgment by France that her great adventure, planned so long and carried through with such *determination in the teeth of world opinion*, had been a mistake and a fiasco.

Mr. MacDonald had a stroke of luck in the fall of M. Poincaré, and in the fact that M. Herriot, the new French Premier, was, like himself, a politician of the Left, and one who had been known to disapprove of his predecessor's policy. But M. Herriot in office was very different from M. Herriot in opposition, and he knew that the least appearance of concession would be enough to arouse against him a hysterical outburst of patriotic emotion. Under these circumstances the tact and firmness of the British Premier were tried to the uttermost. They did not fail.

All started well with a visit of M. Herriot to Mr. MacDonald's official residence at Chequers, at which the two statesmen considered the idea of calling an *Allied Conference to discuss the ways and means of putting the Dawes Scheme into operation*. But when Mr. MacDonald formulated his impressions of those arrangements in a dispatch, there was a terrible outcry



in Paris, and M. Herriot hastened to dissociate himself from any part or lot in its conclusions, making it Mr. MacDonald's turn to cross the Channel and put things right.

When, in July, the Conference did eventually get assembled at London, it had a far from easy task. The French clung desperately to their right to take the law into their own hands in the event of a German default; they clung to the Ruhr, and even when they agreed to swallow the bitter pill of its evacuation, they tried to delay it for two years. All of which obstacles it required the utmost patience and tact to overcome. But overcome they had to be, unless the scheme was to be wrecked at the outset.

Eventually the Germans were called into the discussion—a new and hopeful feature of Reparations Conferences—and it was agreed that the Dawes scheme should be put into operation, and that the Ruhr Occupation should terminate altogether within the space of a year, though as a matter of fact it was, within a few months, robbed of its most objectionable features by being rendered “invisible,” and ceasing to concern itself with the economic control of the occupied territory.

It remained to be seen how far the healing of nations could be accomplished by this simple process of paying debts out of the creditor's pocket, and whether Germany, after the Hell she had been made to undergo, would settle down to her accepted rôle of milch cow with bovine placidity. This, again, would be expecting a great deal from human, and especially from Teutonic, nature.

## CHAPTER VI

### INVINCIBLE ANARCHY

But the problem of Reparations was only part, and that not the most important part, of the task with which the civilized powers were confronted, of reconstructing civilization so as to avert another and perhaps a final catastrophe. For it was conceivable that war debts might cease to be paid or reparations to be collected, without any disastrous consequences ensuing. But could the same be said of a failure to avoid another resort to arms on anything like the scale of the last?

On no subject was there such a need, or such a lack, of clear thinking. It was the fashion to talk of war in the future as if it would not be essentially different from war in the past, an incident, perhaps even a beneficent incident, in human evolution—something that is bound to happen from time to time. As if one should argue that an express train, having made a non-stop run through many stations and a few complicated junctions, could dash on, without stopping, through the terminus. There comes a time when it is a choice between pulling up at the platform and crashing.

It had been the great and redeeming merit of President Wilson that he alone, among the framers of the Versailles Treaty, had realized that there was something more important to be accomplished than a mere harvesting of the fruits of victory. A system of permanent peace had somehow got to be established. It was with this object that he had sacrificed every other consideration, even of justice and—some might

say—of honour to the vanquished, in order to carry through intact the Covenant or Constitution he had framed for a super-national organization that should, in time, be capable of repairing all the merely temporary damage inflicted by the rest of the Treaty.

He had thought this out, not as an opportunist, but as a philosopher, and the philosophy on which he had relied in framing the Covenant had been implicit in his war-time phrase, "to make the world safe for democracy". He did genuinely believe in the virtue of freedom, and in the capacity of sovereign peoples to settle their affairs wisely and peaceably if they were left free to do so. Now that the reactionary governments that had caused the War had toppled in ruins, the world was not only safe for democracy, but clear for the League of Nations, and its reign of justice instead of violence.

When Mr. MacDonald assumed the Premiership, the League had been in operation for four years, and it was possible to estimate a little more precisely its fitness for the high purpose of its foundation. That a major conflict had been avoided was true but hardly relevant, since no such conflict was humanly conceivable till after a period of recuperation. On the other hand, it would have been unfair to have indicted the League for such after-swell of the storm as the conflicts in Poland and Asia Minor.

The League had already a record of useful, if not heroic, achievement to its credit. It had arbitrated successfully on what might have been a dangerous dispute, about the ownership of some Baltic islands, between Sweden and the new state of Finland. It had also intervened to secure a peaceful settlement of a frontier dispute between Jugo-Slavia and Albania. It had been engaged to undertake the even more delicate task of deciding whether the Mosul district of Upper Mesopotamia should belong to Turkey, or to England's protégé, the Arab state of Irak. That task it was destined to accomplish.

Moreover, in many fields of activity, none the less

useful from being often unpretentious, the League was establishing a habit, and even a routine, of international co-operation. Its greatest achievement consisted in the mere fact of its being there, to provide a recognized means, such as had never existed before the War, for the settlement of any dispute or the achievement of any common purpose. It had shown itself capable of providing for the government of such territorial odd corners as the Saar District and the "Free" city of Danzig; it had assumed the trusteeship for such rights and liberties as had been conceded to minorities under the provisions of the Peace Treaties; and it had shown itself capable of really brilliant creative work in organizing the economic and financial recovery of Austria.

This was much to be proud of in so short a period, but it was far from achieving the full purpose of the League, or establishing it in the position that it had to fill, if its task of guaranteeing the peaceful development of civilization was to be undertaken with any hope of success. Its successes, encouraging as they were, did not extend to the curbing of those major acts of violence by which the peace of the world is most seriously threatened. To such open and cynical aggression as that of the Poles, in putting up an "unauthorized" general to relieve Lithuania of the important town of Vilna, it had only been able to respond with the equally cynical solution of confirming the Poles in possession of their loot, and allowing the Lithuanians to compensate themselves as best they could with the German town of Memel. As for that crowning display of anarchic violence, the French invasion of the Ruhr, the League neither would nor could lift a finger to stop it.

The fact was that the authority of the League was fatally impaired by the lopsidedness of its composition. The absence of the United States, of Russia, of Germany, and of the other defeated Powers, robbed it of all representative authority as a world organization. And the numerous insignificant members who did

belong to it, all claiming the status of equal sovereign states, added neither to its prestige nor its efficiency. It was still too much a perpetuation of the Alliance.

What was worst of all was that the philosophic foundations on which it had been built were visibly crumbling. So far from the world having been made safe for democracy, it was showing a tendency to fall upon its free institutions and destroy them, in order to make way for what former generations would have described frankly as tyranny. It was in September 1922 that one of the most momentous revolutions in history had been accomplished by the overthrow of democracy in Italy, and the complete subjection of that country, body and soul, to the will of the Dictator, or, as the ancient Greeks would have called him, the Tyrant, Mussolini.

What sort of a spirit had been breathed into international relationships was soon apparent. The psychological secret of the Dictator's success lay in the skill with which he had played upon the inferiority complex of a people whose martial record had, for centuries, been one of chronic and inglorious failure. To persuade the modern Italians, still smarting from the humiliation of Caporetto, that most ignominious rout of the War, that they were a stern and terrible race of warriors, endowed with all the virtues of their Roman ancestors, was more than to compensate them for any loss of freedom. It only remained to find an enemy weak enough to make it safe to put this idea to the proof. Within less than a year from the bloodless capture of Rome by the Fascisti, such an enemy was forthcoming.

An Italian General had been among those employed on the League's behalf in clearing up the dispute, already mentioned, between Jugo-Slavia and Albania, and in delimiting the Albanian frontier. In that wild and brigand-infested region he and his companions had been set upon and murdered. For no reason whatever, except that this had happened on the borders of Albania and Greece, and that the Greek

Press was vociferously opposed to the Italian mission, the Italians chose to fasten the responsibility upon the Greek Government. A violent ultimatum was presented at Athens, following with singular closeness the lines of the notorious Austrian ultimatum to Serbia that had precipitated the World War, and differing from it principally in halving the time limit. While meekly consenting to the abject apology demanded, the Greeks demurred to the open violation of their sovereignty and the payment of an indemnity, appealing—as they had a perfect right to do—to the decision of the League. Whereupon the Italian fleet appeared off the defenceless, but coveted, Greek island of Corfu, and fearlessly commenced to bombard its obsolete citadel, which was crowded, not with soldiers, but with unhappy refugees and orphans from Asia Minor. Having satisfied honour by the death of 16 of these enemies and the mutilation of many more, the victors proceeded to the occupation of the island. It was perhaps the Dictator's unwillingness to thrust a rival hero into the limelight, that prevented this glory from being followed by a triumph of the Admiral along the Via Cavour and over the ruins of the Forum.

Emboldened by this superb vindication of his country's honour, Mussolini went on to defy the League itself—quite as safe a proposition as that of defying Greece. He would not hear of the Council's intervening, but insisted on the case being referred to the Conference of Ambassadors, those of the four principal ex-Allies, Italy of course being one, and thus being able to act as 25 per cent. of judge in her own case. She also held the stolen island as a blackmailing counter, an extremely valuable one, as its possession would have tilted the naval balance in the Mediterranean to her advantage. There was not even the veneer of justice about the proceedings, which were conducted on the principle of giving a penny to an organ grinder to go into the next street. Only the penny, this time, was extracted from the unfortunate

Greece, and took the form of 50 million lire, this figure being fixed upon for no other reason than that it coincided with the purely arbitrary demand of the Italian ultimatum. For the murder of the poor refugees nothing was charged, and the murderer, with his pockets bulging, was at last persuaded to abandon the rest of the swag and go home. It was a sordid and disastrous affair. Not only had the League been publicly flouted, but one of its most important members had made no secret of treason to the Covenant and all that the League stood for.

It is difficult to blame the League. With no force behind it, and without even the prestige of a world-wide membership, there was nothing for it but to make a virtue of necessity, and compromise with the violence that it could neither mollify nor overawe. It was as yet only in its infancy, and it was too much to expect that a force-proof organization for world peace would have sprung perfect and full armed from the brain of President Wilson. Let the child be kept alive, and it might yet grow into all that its parent had dreamed.

But it was evident that the Corfu fiasco, following upon the Vilna-Memel business, had brought the League to a highly critical stage of its development. Was this sort of thing to go on until it broke up altogether or degenerated into a multilingual debating society on the shores of Lake Lemán, or was there enough goodwill among nations, or even salutary fear, to take warning from this setback, and devise fresh means for assuring that peace on earth to which the only alternative was death?

The problem was twofold. First it was necessary to secure that between civilized nations, as between civilized men, differences should be referred to the decision not of arms but of law. The second requirement, that was intimately bound up with the first, was to bring about a state of things in which civilized nations, like civilized men, should no longer consider it a point of necessity, or honour, to go about armed

to the teeth for the settlement of the aforesaid differences.

The obligation to disarm was not only one of the highest expediency, but also of honour. It was an essential part of the Peace Treaties. In that of Versailles, the stringent disarmament clauses, to which Germany had been bound, had been imposed on the explicit understanding that this was the first stage of a general disarmament. It was as if the Allies had said to Germany, "Let us all agree to beat our swords into ploughshares. Only you, being the loser, and the one least to be trusted with a sword, must beat first."

If such an arrangement had been proposed between two individual duellists, and the victor, being asked by his now disarmed opponent when he was going to fulfil his share of the contract, had shrugged his shoulders, and started distributing fresh swords among his own partisans, his conduct would certainly have been stigmatized as lacking in decency. And if this was the second time he had played the confidence trick on the same victim, this opinion would, to put it mildly, have been strengthened.

But France, which was the ringleader in shirking disarmament, as Italy was in resisting the authority of the League, had at least the excuse that she herself had been the victim of a confidence trick played upon her by her own allies. She was haunted by a deadly and not unjustified fear, that her triumphant violence only increased. What if Germany should arise?

Until that happened, the peace of Europe was being maintained, less by the League, than by the knowledge that France and her retainers had such an overwhelming military supremacy as no one could dare to challenge. There may be worse ways of maintaining the *status quo* in a village than by arming the village bully and allowing him to act as policeman. But if a bigger ex-bully manages to smuggle in a revolver, there will sooner or later come a day of reckoning



for Bully Number 1, and of acute trouble for the whole community.

From the French point of view, disarmament, by itself, was no more a solution than an arrangement by which the two should be armed, not with revolvers, but with precisely similar bludgeons. It is as unpleasant to have your brains battered out, as to have them drilled by a bullet, and even more likely, when the other fellow is twice your size.

It would be an utter mistake to think of France as what she had been in the time of Napoleon, drunken with the lust for fresh power and consumed with land hunger. That description might, to some extent, apply to Fascist Italy, but Post-war France—at any rate after the breakdown of the Ruhr adventure—was emphatically what Bismarck would have called a saturated power. She would have welcomed any arrangement that would have stabilized European peace. But—and here was the fatal qualification—it must be peace on the basis of the Versailles settlement. France must keep all her gains; Germany be resigned to all her losses. The new European system, to be guaranteed by the League, must be one in which the law of Versailles, with its frontiers, tributes and restrictions, was as that of the Medes and Persians, that altereth not. And we must remember, in justice to France, that even if she had wanted to be generous, she would have found it hard. If she had let off the German debtor, she would have either been compelled cynically to bilk her creditors, or to go into bankruptcy—possibly both. As it was, she was enormously out of pocket, and dangerously near the edge of the financial abyss.

It is so easy to sit in one's armchair and say—"At such and such a stage of the proceedings, France, or some other Power, should have done this or that and all would have been well." The problems with which statesmen have to grapple are seldom so free from complication.

At least there could be no doubt of England's

attitude. The overwhelming majority of her people cherished a passionate longing for peace. It is true that the stunt Press was perpetually trying to rekindle the militant imperialism that had been at its height at the close of the last century, but for once the people refused to dance to its piping. The Rudyards had ceased from kipling, and the Haggards rode no more. The least suspicion of bellicose tendencies was the most deadly that could be fastened on to any political party or individual. There was no nation in which loyalty to the League was so whole-hearted, or in which the desire for an effective scheme of disarmament and security was so unqualified. Nor was this merely lip homage, for throughout the Nineteen-twenties English armaments, even at sea and in the now equally important air, were cut down to—and if not beyond—the bare minimum of safety.

But how to secure safety by a guarantee of perpetual peace—that was the question. On this subject there were two schools, or rather tendencies of thought. One was inclined to put its whole confidence in the League, and to seek peace by broadening its basis and strengthening its authority. Nations were like those anarchic primitive men, imagined by Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, who were capable of coming together and pooling their individual liberties. To those who thought most consistently along these lines, the League ought to have been a sovereign of sovereignties, a super-state armed with coercive force.

But there was another school that, if more lacking in revolutionary boldness, was more in harmony with the British tradition. It believed in building from the bottom upwards on a basis of free co-operation. The new world order of which it dreamed was already realized, on a smaller scale, in the British Commonwealth of Nations. Those who inclined to this standpoint were averse from every sort of entangling commitment, especially of a kind that might involve their country in war at the bidding even of the League. They were not prepared to take any step whatever

that might be calculated to break up the unity of sentiment and purpose that held the British League of Nations together. And this, in the existing state of the wider League, was a very real danger; for the Dominions, and particularly Canada, were hardly more inclined than the United States to be dragged into the vortex of European politics. No British statesman, especially after the lesson of Chanak, dared risk a war from which the Dominions would secede.

The real problem was how to graft the British on to the World League. To take refuge in the Empire alone, and allow the rest of the world to go to the devil in its own way, was a counsel of despair, or of suicide. You could not shut up all these scattered colonies and Dominions within a closed compartment of peaceful self-sufficiency. If once the fire started to sweep through the world, no one's house would be safe.

The peace of Europe was therefore a matter of vital importance to Britain, from the Commonwealth no less than from the League standpoint. It was fairly safe, so long as Germany remained helpless and the French combination invincible. But could such a state of things be trusted, even if it were desirable, to prolong itself indefinitely? Overweening military power is not conducive to popularity. The wartime Alliance was not holding together. The rift that had been apparent even during the War between France and Italy had widened into a gaping fissure, and the new, intensely militant Italy of Mussolini was already showing signs of reverting to her Pre-war orientation of the Triple Alliance. Of all the proofs of blindness that French statesmanship offered after the War, the most glaring was the failure to conciliate Italy. Almost any sacrifice would have been worth while, that would have brought the two Latin powers together. But the niggling, haggling spirit of French diplomacy and French bargaining, was never more in evidence than in dealing with the many points of friction between the Gallic and the Italian Empires.

The result was that Italy gradually began to assume an unacknowledged championship of the dispossessed nations, of Germany, of Hungary, of Bulgaria, a championship that would have been even more formidable than it was, but for the fact that Italy had thrust an envenomed barb into Germany's side by her rape of the Austrian Tyrol which, under the Fascist regime, had become the scene of a tyranny unapproached in Italy herself during the palmiest days of the Metternich System. Nothing could be more certain than that a resurrected Germany would claim back the countrymen of Hofer for German rule.

Such was the complication of European politics; such were the seeds of war planted in the European body politic. What was the League going to do about it? And what was going to be the attitude of Britain?

There was at least a hopeful spirit abroad at Geneva. The mere fact of statesmen meeting together and taking counsel about the common affairs of nations, did tend to engender a certain habit of looking at things from a standpoint higher than that of anarchic Nationalism. And there was a quite genuine desire to tackle the kindred problems of disarmament and security. But every step forward that was made in this direction only served to reveal more and more formidable difficulties in the way of finding any practicable, working solution.

The first step had been the eminently sensible one of appointing a Temporary Mixed Commission, to fulfil the covenanted purpose of preparing schemes of disarmament for the League's consideration. The first constructive suggestion came from a British member, Lord Esher, who advocated the fixing of some agreed standard of disarmament, so that when the nations covenanted to disarm in any fixed proportion, there should be no doubt of what each had to do. But the endeavour to arrive at a common measure revealed such a tangle of complications, as to render an agreed solution hopeless.

The next line of approach was suggested by Lord Robert Cecil, afterwards Lord Cecil of Chelwood, who, from its foundation, devoted his life to the service of the League, and can not unfairly be described as the best European since William III. He saw clearly that nations could not be expected to disarm unless the security of each from aggression was guaranteed by all, and he secured the formal adhesion of the League to this principle.

But here again, formulating a principle in the abstract proved a very different thing from applying it in the concrete. The first attempt to do this took the form of a *Treaty of Mutual Assistance* which was drafted by the Commission in 1923, and submitted to the various Powers for approval. This was a comprehensive scheme for giving effect to the doctrine already embodied in the League Covenant—that a State embarking on aggressive war in defiance of the League had committed an act of war on all its members. Its effect would have been to turn the League into a grand defensive alliance, reinforced by subsidiary defensive agreements between its individual members. This solution was highly agreeable to France, and to those smaller Powers who were in doubt of their capacity to defend themselves. But this time it was British opposition that proved the unsuperable obstacle.

This was the more remarkable, since the decision rested with Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, who was both by personal inclination, and in his capacity of Labour Prime Minister, the most ardent friend both of peace and the League, and had even gone so far in pursuit of his ideal as to stop the work that was going forward in fortifying the all-important Singapore base. But Mr. MacDonald was not only an idealist, but a level-headed Scot, with no taste for running his head, or that of his country, against a brick wall. It was soon evident that whether the Mother Country signed the *Treaty* or not, *none of the Dominions were going to have anything to do with it, and that Britain could only*

honour any military obligation that the League might see fit to impose on her, at the price of breaking up the Commonwealth of Nations. That stern European, Lord Robert Cecil, was not for being deterred even by the opposition of the Dominions—but that was a little further than even a Socialist Government was prepared to go.

There was another objection to the Treaty as it stood. The League diagnosis had not even yet got to the root of the trouble. First the way of disarmament had been tried, and it had become apparent that there could be no disarmament without a guarantee of security. But such a guarantee, by itself, might be only the means of precipitating another war unless security were itself made secure on a basis of law. Before the use of arms could be authorized against an aggressive state, aggression must not only be meticulously defined, but rendered impossible, except in case of open and flagrant defiance, by a machinery of international justice and arbitration that would come into action automatically in case of any serious difference between nations.

So, then, we have this trinity, disarmament, security, arbitration, which must be embodied in any arrangement for permanent peace that is to be effective.

But neither the League nor Mr. MacDonald himself was to be discouraged by the failure of the Draft Treaty. Never had there been a more effective will to peace than when the Fifth Assembly of the League met at the beginning of September, 1924. Mr. MacDonald was now relieved of the task of trying to conciliate the impossible M. Poincaré, and in M. Herriot he had a colleague as ardent as himself in the cause of peace. Their efforts were seconded by those of such constructive pacifists as M. Benes, of Czechoslovakia, and M. Politis of Greece. The result was a new and more profoundly thought out plan for ensuring peace, embodied in the document known as the Geneva Protocol.

Here the machinery of arbitration was precisely

defined, and elaborated in such a way as to provide—so far as human ingenuity could do so—for the peaceful settlement of every sort of dispute. At the same time the method of applying sanctions to any hardened aggressor was made correspondingly more elastic, and left to the discretion and honour of the nations concerned. Except at the bidding of the League, the right to go to war in any circumstances was formally abolished. Finally, the validity of the Protocol was made dependent on the success of a disarmament conference that was to be convened in the following year.

Thus the principle of the Protocol was that arbitration and disarmament were both to be given the fullest trial before there could be any question of applying sanctions.

Here was at last the framework of a Treaty in support of which Mr. MacDonald's Government would have been willing, nay eager, to throw the decisive weight of Britain into the scale. But their time was almost exhausted, and when the matter came up for decision, it was a different, and far more critical, administration that was responsible for the choice. So that when Britain gave her final word, it was not to bless, but to veto.

It was tragic that so brave and hopeful an effort should have ended thus. It was only too fatally easy to find objections, and to detect dangers, in every conceivable attempt to secure peace. But no danger that could possibly be imagined could be compared with that involved in leaving peace unsecured. The very argument that was on the lips of every reactionary, to the effect that there always had been wars from the beginning of the world, was decisive against letting matters drift in the old way, and trusting to the good old anarchy of nations to work out some sort of equilibrium. That plan had never worked in the past, and there was no reason to believe that things would be different in the future. Only by conscious contrivance, by an effort positively heroic, and involving

the deliberate acceptance of risks, could there be any chance of averting the otherwise ultimately certain disaster of a war in which civilization would be overwhelmed. To do anything may have been hazardous ; to do nothing was suicidal.

And yet, in fairness, we must admit the possibility that even now the Geneva peacemakers had not probed deep enough into the source of the evil. How could any arrangement for perpetual peace, on the basis of the *status quo* established at Versailles, avoid perpetuating injustice ? Were the new frontiers and tributes to be guaranteed forever by the League ? Was the relative helplessness of the defeated Powers to survive any scheme of disarmament ? Were all the colonies and mandates to be the monopoly of the victors ? And if not, what machinery, other than war, was provided for the redress of these grievances ? And would France, that was so anxious for security, consent to such machinery being set up ? Would even Britain, where her own interests were touched ?

Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it—which means, among other things, that you cannot build a lasting peace on the sands of injustice.



## CHAPTER VII

### LABOUR OUT OF OFFICE

If, as it would seem, Mr. MacDonald's Government had counted on at least two or three years of office, it displayed extraordinary ineptitude in making no attempt to conciliate the all-powerful Liberal balance-holders. For both parties had an equal interest in coming to a working arrangement—Labour because it wanted time to develop its policy, or to show the country that it had a policy; the Liberals, because they laboured under the handicap rightly or wrongly attributed in our childhood to the bee—that it can only sting once, and that with fatal consequences to itself. For the Liberals had owed the limited measure of success they had enjoyed at the last election, not so much to any popularity of their own, as to the fact that numbers of voters had put their crosses for them because they wanted some way of repudiating Protection without going over to Socialism. The Liberal tactics in putting Labour into office had infuriated the opponents of Socialism without attracting a single vote from its supporters. The adroitness with which the Middle Party was exploiting its advantage of the balance struck the average English voter as being too clever by half.

Moreover, the Liberals were discovering that the only thanks they got for keeping Labour in office took the form of public humiliation. Mr. Lloyd George had plaintively described his party as the patient oxen drawing the Labour car, which had elicited from Mr. Baldwin the dry comment that he did not covet his neighbour's ox. Mr. Henderson, the Labour Home

Secretary, openly challenged the Liberals to get on with the job and turn the Government out. And it was humiliatingly evident that the Liberals were only refraining from doing so for reasons of pure tactics—or because they were afraid of the consequences. The country felt that it knew where it was with Mr. Baldwin and his Conservatives, who had accepted the verdict of the polls against Protection, and who had never made any pretence of compromising with Socialism. But for what, or even for whom, the Liberals stood, passed the wit of the plain man to imagine. It was true that Mr. Lloyd George's fertile brain was already beginning to busy itself with fresh schemes—or stunts—of "planning." Under his auspices, one was produced for applying electricity to the solution of the Coal problem. But the memory of Homes for Heroes, and of the use that Mr. Lloyd George had made of the blank cheque presented to him by the country in 1918, had engendered a certain scepticism about his electoral prospectuses.

By the beginning of August, when Parliament rose for its vacation, it was becoming evident that the Liberals would soon be compelled to take the plunge they so much dreaded. The Government was visibly tottering to its fall. Its fatal weakness, as might have been foreseen, consisted in the association that had already been formed in the public mind, between Labour and Russian Bolshevism. The result of the *Daily Herald* revelations, of the Council of Action at the time of the Russo-Polish War, and of countless speeches and articles, was to create an atmosphere of nervous suspicion, in which it was almost impossible for the Government to make any advances towards Russia without being suspected of the worst.

This was extremely unfortunate for Mr. MacDonald, who was certainly not inspired by any love for the Reds, but who wished to substitute a constructive policy of good relations with Russia for the ferocious and mutual nagging that had gone on during Lord Curzon's tenure of the Foreign Office. It is true that

any sort of politeness to the Bolsheviks was characterized in the more reactionary organs of the Press as shaking hands with murder. But this principle, if consistently applied, would have put a stop to all intercourse whatever between nations, except at the cannon's mouth, and nobody in his senses could imagine that it was possible to put to eternal Coventry a nation of some hundred and sixty million inhabitants. It was therefore the merest common sense that impelled Labour, immediately upon coming into office, to try to make a fresh start with Russia, by frankly acknowledging her Government, and inviting her to send plenipotentiaries in order that the many outstanding questions between the two Powers might be ordered and settled on a footing of friendly intercourse.

Joseph Chamberlain had long ago fluttered diplomatic dovescotes by publicly announcing the necessity of taking a long spoon when dining with the old Tsarist Government. An even longer spoon was needful in dealing with the new Red than with the old White Tsars. Before Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Lloyd George had done his best to come to some sort of a working arrangement with the Bolsheviks, and burnt his fingers in the process. The Bolsheviks had not yet got beyond the stage of proselyting ardour that had been reached by the Jacobins during the Reign of Terror. They still dreamed of a universal Jacquerie that should convert the whole world into a Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. At this time, they certainly had no intention of using the Labour or any other Government as more than a stepping stone to their ultimate purpose. Their propaganda, particularly among Eastern peoples, was ceaseless and subtle, and it was not likely that any pledge would induce them to do more than camouflage it. Only time and experience would convince these austere and relentless enthusiasts that "All or nothing" was not practical politics, and that it might be necessary even for Red Russia to make to herself friends of the mammon of Capitalist unrighteousness.

The negotiations between the Government and the Russian delegates did not run a smooth course. One part of the Bolshevik programme had consisted in general repudiation of all debts, and the seizure of the industrial properties held by British subjects in Russia. It may have seemed odd that a Labour Government should have felt itself impelled to press for at least some decent semblance of compensation for Capitalist creditors, but if Russia had been let off scot free, it would have been hard to have taken up a less obliging attitude to such extremely unwilling debtors as France and Italy. This appeared to ensure a complete deadlock, since neither the philosophy nor the inclinations of the Bolsheviks were likely to induce them to disburse a rouble of stolen property or to honour the least of their covenanted obligations, and there was no means of compelling them.

But might not the same method that was being applied to the Reparations difficulty hold good also for this one of the Russian liabilities—the method, that is to say, of the creditor lending the debtor the wherewithal to pay his debts? Unfortunately, Mr. MacDonald had proclaimed at an early stage of the proceedings, that a British loan to Russia was absolutely out of the question. This was unfortunate, as it appeared that the Russians might be ready to do business on such lines, and it seems to have struck Mr. MacDonald, on second thoughts, that he had perhaps been a little too uncompromising. Suppose that the loan could be hedged about with so many conditions and safeguards as to render it to the last degree improbable that it would ever be lent? It was diamond cut diamond. But the great thing was to get a treaty of some sort patched up, and not to have the humiliation of a public breakdown.

On August 31st, however, this breakdown was actually announced by the Foreign Office. The whole negotiation seemed at an end. But then occurred a surprising transformation. Certain of the extremist section of the Labour leaders were determined that,

come what might, a Treaty must be concluded. The broken-up conference was re-assembled; there was another breakdown; but on the evening of the 6th it was announced to an astonished House of Commons that the Treaty had actually been agreed upon and was about to be signed. And it included, in the teeth of Mr. MacDonald's assurances, a British guarantee for a loan of £30 millions. The Premier then proceeded to burn his boats by announcing he would make the acceptance of this Treaty by Parliament a question of confidence.

This was too much, except perhaps for those steady supporters of Labour who were ready to back up the team in all circumstances. It was no use explaining that the loan was never likely to materialize. What the ordinary man gathered was that Labour had arranged to make over £30 millions of the Taxpayers' money to its Bolshevik friends, who had cynically defaulted on every debt, public and private, that they had ever contracted. A Conservative election poster hit off the popular idea of the transaction by depicting a British working man saying "I want a job," and a hairy Tovarich capping him with "I want £30,000,000."

In the two months of Parliamentary recess, public opinion had time to harden against the still unratified Treaty, and it was soon evident that by no conceivable combination of circumstances could it secure the assent of Parliament. The Government would evidently have to beat an ignominious retreat or go to the country. And there was no retreat with honour, now that Mr. MacDonald had made it a question of confidence.

The Liberals had more reason to be dismayed at the situation than Labour itself. In spite of their bold words, they would have accepted almost any compromise rather than go to the polls. But to have made themselves responsible for the Russian Loan would have been to damn themselves forever in the eyes of all but those who would, in any case, vote

Socialist. As it turned out, the choice was never presented to them.

As soon as Parliament met, and had got through the urgent and delicate business of arranging for a Commission to determine the Boundaries of the Protestant part of Ulster, and overriding the Protestant boycott of any Commission at all, a minor incident cropped up that precipitated the election. A certain Mr. Campbell, a Communist, had been prosecuted for circulating seditious matter among the troops. The prosecution was then suddenly dropped, on the rather lame excuse of Mr. Campbell himself being an ex-service man with a good war record, an excuse that was demolished by Mr. Campbell himself, who attributed the Government's *volte face* to the dictation of its own extremist supporters. Nothing could have been better calculated to confirm the already growing suspicion that it was the Bolshevik tail that was wagging the Labour dog. The Unionists had tabled a vote of censure. But the Liberals, in a desperate effort to provide a bridge of gold for Labour to retreat over, drafted an amendment to have the whole affair of the prosecution reported on by a select committee.

But Mr. MacDonald was now to prove as unaccommodating to the Liberals as Mr. Campbell had been to him. He knew that the defeat of his Government could only be postponed for a very few days, since Mr. Asquith had already stated, with unwonted clearness, the fact that the Liberals would have nothing to do with any Treaty embodying a loan to Russia. There was something to be said in favour of riding for a fall on this comparatively unimportant side issue. Accordingly he declared the intention of his Government to stand or fall by the rejection of the amendment. The only chance for the Liberals was now to defeat the original motion, and have their own amendment defeated by Conservative votes. But Mr. Baldwin was not to be baulked of his prey, and the Conservatives obligingly helped to carry the amendment to their own motion.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BACK TO GOLD

The General Election was a personal triumph for Mr. Baldwin beyond hope and expectation. Up to the last moment, it would seem, the intrigue against him, fostered by his implacable enemies, the millionaire Press bosses, was going on behind the scenes. Something like the old Coalition was to have been revived under the leadership, this time, of Sir Robert Horne.<sup>1</sup> It is true that the bosses themselves fell into line during the Election, either from genuine fear of the Socialists, or calculation on a Conservative majority small enough to play into their hands. But so smashing a triumph left Mr. Baldwin master of the situation. He had played his difficult hand, in Opposition, with admirable judgment, for the very reason that he had played it not only with moderation and good temper, but with downright straightness. His very innocence of political manoeuvre was counted to him for righteousness. Next to the King, he was probably the most trusted man in the country.

He would have need of all this trust in the years that were to come. The politicians who had been billed to supplant him had, for the most part, no personal feeling in the matter, and were quite ready to adapt themselves to circumstances by following his now victorious leadership. But it was a different matter with the Press lords. There was something in Mr. Baldwin's complete failure to be impressed by their greatness, that must have been almost maddening to men obsessed by their own sense of it. While

<sup>1</sup> *The Real Stanley Baldwin*, by Wickham Steed, pp. 63-4.

everybody else deferred to, wheedled, flattered them, this upstart countryman plodded complacently along his chosen path, puffing his pipe, for all the world as if they did not exist. Did he not know what had been the fate of Balfour, who had ignored, of Kitchenier, who had despised, and of Lloyd George, who had defied, their dictation? Who was Stanley Baldwin to stand where these had fallen? If even by this time he had not learnt how hard it is to kick against the pricks of Fleet Street, he must be taught. All the engines of mass suggestion must be put into motion to crush him, without scruple, ruth, or intermission. Day in, day out, it would be insinuated, through a hundred channels, that the Premier was a flabby sentimentalist, incapable of grasping the problems of statesmanship, one who, through sheer ineptitude, would betray his party to the Socialists and the Empire to the Internationalists—poor old Baldwin, more fool perhaps than knave, but a bit of a knave all the same!

This was to play directly into the hands of the very Socialists against whom the stunt Press was constantly inveighing. But it failed to break or bend Mr. Baldwin. Only once in the years of office that lay before him would he deign to turn and rend his assailants. At all other times his attitude was that defined by the Keith motto—"They have said. What say they? Let them say!" That under the circumstances he should never have forfeited the leadership and loyalty of his Party was—to use the favourite epithet of his assailants—amazing, and a proof, if any could be, of heroic stature. But the ceaseless calumny to which he was exposed in what, under normal conditions, would have been a supporting Press, was more than the strongest Premier at the head of the strongest government could have sustained without loss of prestige leading, in fullness of time, to loss of power.

But for the moment, the vendetta was suspended, and on the morrow of the election Mr. Baldwin, with



his huge majority to back him, appeared to be in a position of power and opportunity such as has fallen to the lot of few statesmen. The country had pronounced, with an overwhelming voice, for a spell of the firm and quiet government that it had expected from Mr. Bonar Law two years before. For the next few years, at any rate, there could be no question of a fiscal revolution. Mr. Baldwin had given a definite pledge not to introduce a general tariff, though leaving his hands free for minor adjustments, and for the safeguarding of special threatened industries. The country knew that such a pledge would be honoured in the spirit no less than the letter.

This time there was to be no question of a Second Eleven Government. The shock of defeat had, in Mr. Baldwin's own words, pulled the Party together, and the bitterness engendered by the Carlton House Meeting was only kept alive, for their own purposes, by a few mischief-makers. Mr. Baldwin had the full strength of the Party to choose from. The last of the crosses Lord Curzon was destined to sustain was inflicted by the appointment of Mr. Austen Chamberlain, whose reputation for honesty rivalled that of the Premier himself, to the Foreign Office. On Curzon's death, which followed in the early spring, Lord Balfour was brought into the Government in an advisory capacity. Lord Birkenhead, as hard-bitten a realist as had ever risen to higher things on stepping-stones of successful advocacy, went to the Indian Office.

But the boldest, as well as the most unexpected, of Mr. Baldwin's appointments, was that to the Exchequer of Mr. Winston Churchill, the wandering, and—with the possible exception of Mr. Lloyd George—easily the most brilliant star of the political constellation. But it was a brilliance, like that of his father before him, haunted by a strange fatality. It was as if the gods had given him every gift except that coolness of judgment, that inhibitive common-

sense, that was the strength of Mr. Baldwin. His genius was that of the cavalry officer he had been in his youth; he thought and spoke as if life were one prolonged battlefield or game of soldiers. His mind was perpetually busy with some annihilating charge or decisive *manœuvre*, that always brought him within an ace of victory, and then not infrequently ended in disaster. He had been responsible for the attempt to cut the Home Rule knot with the sword, that had precipitated, on the very eve of the War, a crisis in the Army unprecedented for centuries; his master-stroke of strategy, that might have halved the duration of the War, had ended in the blood-bath of Gallipoli; he had afterwards punted, with the taxpayers' money, on the success of the Russian Counter-revolutionary armies. It is not surprising, under these circumstances, that his boundless trust in himself was far from being shared by those who judged his career, not by its just missed possibilities, but by its results up to date.

It was therefore a remarkable proof of Mr. Baldwin's independence of judgment that he should have chosen Mr. Churchill, of all people, for the key post of his ministry. It was the last thing that the male Aunt Sally, of Carmelite House fiction, would have dreamed of doing. Neither the Conservative Party, nor Mr. Baldwin himself, had the least reason to love Mr. Churchill. One point on which his judgment had never failed him was his uncanny intuition of the winning side in domestic politics. He had turned Liberal just as the tide was beginning to flow in that direction, on the morrow of the South African War; during the World War he had turned from the setting star of Mr. Asquith to follow that of Mr. Lloyd George; now that too had set, and it was time to cast adrift altogether from the waterlogged and foundering ship of Liberalism. Mr. Churchill who, in 1922, had been thrown out of his Dundee constituency by an eccentric candidate whose object it was to make it an offence to imbibe stimulants, had tried to come back,

at a by-election in 1924, as an Independent Conservative, or rather Anti-Socialist candidate, his fancy for the moment being that new middle party that was being promoted by the intriguers against Mr. Baldwin. He characteristically contrived to miss, by the narrowest of margins, capturing the safest Conservative seat in the country from the official candidate. But Mr. Baldwin was not the man to bear resentment, nor Mr. Churchill to fight for any cause longer than he saw reason. He had shown that he was still a force to be reckoned with, and the General Election of 1924 found him provided with a safe constituency and marching in step with the Conservative regulars. And so on the morrow of victory, the returned deserter was promoted over the heads of faithful veterans who had never left the colours, to what was practically second-in-command.

This was an act of deliberate and profound calculation on Mr. Baldwin's part. A more ideal combination could not have been imagined than that between his new colleague's brilliance, and what a Roman might have characterized as his own *gravitas*. Moreover he must have realized how deep-rooted and honourable an ambition was fulfilled by this opportunity granted to Mr. Churchill of approving himself in that office in which his father's career had been so tragically cut short. And yet the experiment was not without its hazards. For the qualifications of the successful cavalry officer have little in common with those of the financial expert.

The appointment of Mr. Churchill made it certain that the new Government would not be tied to a policy of mere stabilization. Mr. Baldwin, for all his great majority, was in the position of a doctor who, having diagnosed the case and prescribed the remedy, is forbidden to apply it. The cure of unemployment by Protection and Preference, except in minute doses, was barred to him. But he was determined to make the best of his limitations, and to fight revolution not by the mere negation that his critics would have

enjoined, but by a policy that should be both constructive and national. He was too whole-hearted a patriot to be more than a lukewarm partisan. Merely to maintain the interests of a class, or the rights of property, was too limited an objective. Though the name was not yet coined, he aspired to be the head of a national rather than a party government, and even the nation he visualized not as a self-contained unit, but as the member of a Commonwealth. He had, accordingly, no scruple in taking over what was best in the policy of rival parties. His critics were perfectly right when they indicted him for being consistently Liberal in spirit and frequently Socialist in method.

The versatile genius of Mr. Churchill was more capable of lending itself to the realization of such an ideal than the intelligence of any consistent party man. Throughout his career, party had been of no more importance to him than country to a soldier of fortune. But his patriotism, though of a type better suited to a soldier than a statesman, was passionately sincere.

The prospect that opened before the Baldwin-Churchill combination was one of seemingly boundless opportunity. If we can put ourselves back in imagination to where we were at the beginning of 1925, we shall realize how abundant seemed the food for optimism. It was as if the good ship Civilization, after the frightful buffeting she had received, was at last entering, with a favourable breeze, upon smooth waters. A new equilibrium had been found to replace that so rudely upset in 1914. The Dawes Plan provided a reasonable prospect of ending the long haggle about Reparations, and putting the intercourse of nations on a peace, instead of a war footing. A spirit of renewed confidence was abroad, and producing a bullish feeling in markets. Perhaps poor Curzon's prophecy was after all going to come true, and the world's great age to begin anew. For by this time science had had abundant opportunity to overtake the damage caused by the War. The wastage of popula-

tion had been more than replaced, and whatever might be the case with those at the top of the social ladder, it was easy to show that the lot of the average worker, provided he were in employment, was not worse but better than it had been in 1914. The international situation afforded every prospect of a peace indefinitely prolonged, at least among civilized Powers. And the General Election had showed that a sufficient majority of voters, even under a universal franchise, was opposed to revolutionary experiment, and believed in working out the salvation of the country within the framework of the existing social order.

It was not yet apparent on what crazy foundations the whole fabric of the new prosperity reposed, or how civilization had only secured a partial respite from its present troubles by laying up worse trouble for itself in the future. The solution of none of the major problems, of debts, of tariffs, of unemployment, of currency, of peace, had been no more than postponed. The international anarchy was tending to get worse rather than better. The idea that a few years of firm and efficient government would open for England an assured prospect of health, wealth and wisdom for an indefinite number of years was a palpable delusion. The idea, even, that an English Government could, by any means, without the active co-operation of foreign Governments, have prevented things from working together for an eventual catastrophe, was equally a delusion. You've got to get up early, as Mr. Biglow put it, if you want to take in God—or to evade the sequence of cause and effect in human affairs.

These considerations did not visibly affect the confidence with which Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Churchill approached their task of restoring the national prosperity. The King's Speech, on the opening of Parliament in December, and Mr. Baldwin's, at the Conservative Victory celebration in the Albert Hall, showed that the new Conservatism, like that of Disraeli, was not inconsistent with a generous and progressive

policy of social reform. Slum clearance, a housing policy that should over-ride vested interests, pensions for widows, improved old age pensions, were among the promised first-fruits of the new regime. Could Labour itself have offered more?

Nor was proof long in coming that these were no idle promises. Mr. Churchill was not the man to let the grass grow beneath his feet. His first Budget Speech, at the end of April, was not only a balancing of accounts, but a comprehensive statement of policy. It was his great opportunity come at last, and he rose to it. The speech was an oratorical masterpiece—Gladstone himself had scarcely displayed a greater power of making figures alive.

He was, like his two immediate predecessors, in the happy position of being able to estimate, on last year's basis, for a fat surplus of revenue over expenditure, a surplus that he proposed to increase, by fresh taxation, to the handsome sum of £36 millions, to be distributed in benefits. With this he proposed to bring down income tax another 6*d.* to 4*s.*, to lower super-tax, and to grant certain minor Imperial Preferences. At the same time he announced that legislation would be introduced to implement the promises of additional benefits to the old and the widows, which, though they would not begin to take effect before the beginning of 1926, would saddle the State with an annual charge rising, ultimately, to a peak figure of £24 millions. But then Mr. Churchill announced that he intended to aim at progressive economies in expenditure amounting to not less than £10 millions each year.

The new taxes were not galling. The lowering of the Super-tax was offset by an increase of Death Duties, and the Mackenna Duties, which Mr. Snowden had thrown to the winds on a point of orthodoxy, were of course restored. There was also a duty on real and artificial silk, which was violently assailed as an attack on the poor girl's stockings, but whose effects did not, in the long run, prove to be such as

to cause any perceptible hardship. Never had an odd £10 millions been more painlessly and neatly extracted.

These changes alone would have been sufficient to make the Budget of 1925, with the possible exception of the People's Budget of 1909, the most remarkable of modern times. But this was not all, for in introducing it Mr. Churchill took occasion to announce a momentous decision of financial policy. England was to return to the gold standard, on a basis of the Pre-war parity with the dollar. The Bank of England, that is to say, was bound to give gold bullion at a fixed rate, in exchange for paper coinage above a certain amount. Henceforth, though you might lack the clinking sovereigns of Pre-war days, you could feel that the Treasury notes in your purse were not valued by anybody's will or caprice, but were worth their equivalent in good, solid gold. And the pound, to adopt one of Mr. Lloyd George's flowers of rhetoric, would be able once more to look the dollar in the face.

It was an operation that at the time came in for singularly little criticism, and that—with the exception of one slashing pamphlet by Mr. Keynes—of a rather perfunctory order. How far Mr. Baldwin, and how far Mr. Churchill, was its prime mover, is not yet known, but for different reasons it was a project equally likely to commend itself to the mind of either statesman. It was one of those dramatic, decisive moves in which Mr. Churchill specialized. To Mr. Baldwin, the same motives that inspired his funding of the American debt held good for the restoration of the gold standard. It was honest, and, for that very reason, in the best sense British. We must remember what an experience the world had had of the effects of dishonest money, money that had had no solid and tangible equivalent, and represented just as much of debt as the debtor, who printed the paper, elected to pay. The mark had gone and the rouble—amid what circumstances of dire misery! The franc was threatened. The pound had only been

prevented, just in time, from sliding over the edge. It is true that there were those who did not hesitate to point out the uses of inflation for lifting the burden of the national, and indeed of all debts. But the expedient of cheating creditors by paying them in debased coinage was not calculated to enhance the credit of the country that practised it, nor was it one to commend itself to the British sense of fair play. Even the Labour Party, hardly as it bore on the *rentiers*, never seriously contemplated this simple way of disposing of their claims.

The question of honest money was not only domestic. The whole economic order of modern civilization depended, in the last resort, upon faith in promises. It was impossible that trade could ever flow freely between nations if this faith were undermined. One of the most insidious forms taken by the international anarchy was for every nation to constitute itself judge of the extent to which it intended to honour its contracts. It was not in the least degree necessary to use that ugly word, "repudiation." All that was necessary could be done by manipulating the currency, or the exchanges. The result of unanchored currencies was thus to plant the seeds of universal distrust. And this, again, had the effect of making every nation seek to depend as far as possible on its own resources, and build up higher and higher the tariff walls that kept out the goods and services of its neighbours. Which, in its turn, had the effect of throwing the world's whole economic system out of gear, and bringing about such maladjustments as the existence of armies of hungry unemployed in some countries, and the destruction in others of the necessities of life from sheer inability to market them.

Now the advantage of gold in a world in which no nation would submit to any human authority outside its own frontier, was that it did at least act as an impartial umpire. If a man agrees to pay you 5 per cent. in gold, or its equivalent, for the next twenty years, you can at least feel that you know



within reasonable limits, what the arrangement is going to mean. But if a man agrees to pay you 5 per cent. in the paper of his native country, it may mean anything or nothing. And even if you stipulate for payment in your own currency, you may legitimately doubt his ability to go on purchasing or transferring it indefinitely.

To get the civilized world on to gold was, therefore, among the first things needful for the successful functioning of its economic system. And what nation had a greater responsibility in the matter than England? By taking her stand beside America for honest money and honest trade, she would be helping to usher in that era of peaceful prosperity for which the world was looking. The Dominions had already set the example—was the Mother Country to linger behind in the wilderness of unsound finance?

But the argument for the Gold Standard, however convincing in the abstract, rested on the assumption that the impartial umpire would be given fair play. And this was just what, under Post-war conditions, gold was not getting. There was the disturbing factor of war debts, and this was aggravated by the policy of the nations most concerned. America, in particular, which had the greatest interest in the smooth working of the scheme of payment, deemed it her even greater interest to make it ultimately unworkable. The War had changed her from a heavy debtor to the greatest creditor nation in the world, but she made no attempt to adapt herself to the new conditions by opening her doors to the goods and services in which alone she could have been conveniently paid. Instead, under her Government of normalcy, she actually raised her tariffs so as to restrict imports still further, while at the same time she was making every effort to push her exports, the surplus of her vast productive power, in all the markets of the world.

The natural result of this would have been to make America as vast a receptacle of bullion as Spain had been in the sixteenth century. But this, for a few

years, was evaded, by the fact that the more money she was paid, the more she continued to lend. She kept her debtors more or less solvent by increasing their obligations from year to year. She was getting paid not in cash, but in vast accumulations of promises, promises that would be kept just as long as she continued to stand the racket. But once let America, or individual Americans, begin to doubt the solvency of these debtors, whose debts they were themselves footing, once let the flow of loans be cut off, and then either, or both, of two things would happen. First, a disproportionately large amount of the world's gold would pour into the United States and become immobilized in the vaults of its banks, throwing the gold standard into hopeless confusion. Secondly, the debtors, with many polite and a few genuine regrets, would plead inability to pay gold or anything else, and the creditor would discover that as soon as he stopped paying himself, he would stop being paid.

It was, then, a most unprofitable game that America was playing ; but after all, with her immense riches, she could better afford to play it than anybody else. The effect of England's coming on to gold was to make her also a player, but with an unprecedented handicap. For she, too, was a creditor nation—on paper. Much more was owed to her than she herself owed. Before the War she had been called the banker of the world—she wanted to resume that rôle. For that reason it was all important that her credit should be placed, at any cost, above suspicion.

But like the United States, though by less obvious and brutal methods, she was developing usury at the expense of trade. John Bull has been described as a shopkeeper, but he is also a money-lender, and can only attract clients by a certain discouragement of customers. The firm maintained its good name and offered reasonable accommodation, but the prices of goods in the shop window had to be raised, by ever such a small amount. That is to say, when Britain

went on gold, she had to charge a little more, abroad, for her exports. To take an instance employed by Mr. Keynes: a firm exports coal to Rio at the narrowest possible margin of profit. Before the resumption of the gold standard, it is just able to undercut the prices of United States coal. But now that the price of English money has been put up, that firm is compelled to charge a little more, in Brazilian money, for its profit. And that little more is just sufficient to turn the scale. The canny Brazilian buys American coal, and for the English firm there is nothing doing. The repercussions are not long in being felt at the pit head, somewhere in South Wales perhaps. Less coal is wanted. Fewer hands are required. The mine-owner finds his profits vanishing and tries to recoup himself by cutting down his wage bill. There is trouble. And just the same thing is happening in other trades.

We have put it, for the sake of clearness, as if some very gross and catastrophic difference had been made. But this is not the case. We are speaking of a tendency so slight as to be hardly obvious at the time even to the Government's bitterest critics, an almost imperceptible tilt given to the balance of trade. The wild rhetoric that was used, after the collapse of the whole system, about nailing Britain to a cross of gold, was nonsense. There were powerful arguments for, as well as against, the gold standard—even now the verdict on Mr. Churchill's departure may not be unanimous. He was playing for great stakes, not for one country only, but for the world. With a little more goodwill between nations, with a more enlightened sense of their common as against their individual interests, honest money might have turned out the soundest policy after all.

## CHAPTER IX

### LOCARNO

The coming of the Conservatives into power imparted a different spirit from that of Mr. MacDonald into the conduct of British Foreign Policy. Mr. Austen Chamberlain was less of the cosmopolitan idealist than his predecessor, and more of the old-fashioned patriot. His mind, therefore, tended to run in the National-Imperialist grooves of Pre-war statesmanship. It was not that he declined to seek peace and ensue it in his own fashion, but that his love for peace was qualified to a greater extent by the fear of compromising the power and even the safety of his country.

The effects of the new spirit were not long in making themselves felt. The work on the Singapore Base was promptly resumed. A terrific ultimatum put to silence the murmurings of the children of Egypt. The Russian Treaty, still unratified, was torn to shreds with what, in dealing with a civilized Power, would have been insulting brusqueness. And finally, the whole work of the Geneva Protocol, which had at least been the boldest bid for peace made since the War, and which would have had the assent of Mr. MacDonald and his Government, was brought to nothing by the refusal of England, on second thoughts, to have anything to do with it, a refusal curiously reminiscent of that of the American Senate to accept President Wilson's creation of the League of Nations. There were, of course, all sorts of arguments against this, as there would have been against any other peace plan, most cogent of all being the refusal of the Domin-

ions to co-operate. But the argument against letting things drift on to universal suicide might have been accounted more cogent than all of them put together.

It needed a powerful and vivid imagination to give its due weight to this side of the question, and honesty rather than imagination was Mr. Chamberlain's strong suit. Perhaps, too, there was something to be said in favour of building the edifice of peace upon foundations already laid, instead of constructing it according to an ideal plan on some wholly new site. But it came as a painful shock to the friends of peace at Geneva when Mr. Chamberlain, in March, 1925, announced to the Assembly of the League his country's rejection of the Protocol, in a speech that took the form of a slashing attack upon it and whose real author—we have Mr. Wickham Steed's authority for believing—was not Mr. Chamberlain himself, but Lord Balfour, who was voicing the sentiments of the majority of the Cabinet.

Mr. Chamberlain could hardly have failed to be embarrassed by the part assigned to him, since he was an ardent Gallophile, and the mainspring of his policy consisted in co-operation with France. He was not long in showing how far he was prepared to go in this direction. The Cologne, or Northern Sector of the Allied Occupation of the Rhineland, ought to have been evacuated, under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, by January, 1925. It was at Cologne that the British Army had its headquarters. But the French put in an objection. The evacuation had only been conditional on Germany fulfilling her part of the Treaty, and particularly the disarmament clauses. Which was just what, according to the French, the Germans had not done. In several quite avoidable ways they had evaded the stringent requirements of the Treaty. And here, at least, the French had a case that was probably watertight, from a strictly legal standpoint.

But how long was it right or expedient to stand on the strict letter of the law in this matter of Disarma-

ment, when the Germans had every reason for pleading that both its letter and its spirit had been violated by the refusal of the Allies to take any serious steps towards that general disarmament, of which the German contribution had been specifically intended to be only a first instalment? It was as plain as a pikestaff that France had not the remotest intention of doing her share, and was relying for her security on her—at present—overwhelming predominance, and the ring of bayonets with which she had surrounded Germany.

Apart from any consideration of legality or honour, was this state of things, in which the defeated nations were placed utterly at the mercy of France and her allies, to go on forever? This was a question that the French mind, reputed to be so logical, never appears to have envisaged with any clearness. For the Germans would have had to be more or less than human if they had accepted, for a moment longer than they could help, the position of humiliating inferiority, whose continuance was not only becoming, every year, more grossly a breach of treaty, but which had already exposed them to such outrage as that of the Ruhr invasion. To raise hands of horror over the dilatoriness or evasiveness of the Hun in stripping himself of his last means of defence, showed a certain lack, not only of honesty, but of humour. There was no moral argument for France's claim to keep Germany disarmed without disarming herself, or any argument at all, save that of force.

But was France, the logical, prepared, not only now, but for all time, to push this argument to its conclusion? Did she seriously believe that Germany would not, some day, lose patience and assert her right to self-defence, or that having done so, she would stop at self-defence? Or was France prepared, not only now, but for all time, to cross the Rhine, with every man, horse, and gun, the moment Germany took the first definite step towards re-arming in defiance of the Treaty? Would she dare to do so,

with a probably hostile Italy on her flank? Unless her answer was to be a permanent and unalterable "Yes", and if she was not prepared to scrap the Versailles Treaty, and come to an agreement with her adversary while he was in an agreeing mood, there was nothing for it but for France to take up a position that she knew in her heart of hearts she could not defend, and to wait, like an inverted Micawber, for the thing she most feared *not* to turn up.

Without ever committing herself to a specific declaration of her intention to enforce German disarmament in the only way that it could, ultimately, be enforced, France continued to cling to that part of the Treaty of Versailles that imposed obligations on Germany and not on herself. Germany was in default on disarmament, and until this was remedied there could be no evacuation of any part of the Rhineland. This was embarrassing enough for England, who had no desire to introduce any element of friction into the working of the new Dawes scheme, or to do anything that might have even the appearance of playing fast and loose with Treaty obligations. It would have been quite open for her to have marched her troops out of the area, and left the French to take such steps as they chose. It is conceivable that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, it is more than probable that Mr. Lloyd George, would have taken this course had the decision rested with them. But Mr. Austen Chamberlain was not prepared to break with France, even under these circumstances, and he had the letter of the law on his side. And so, to the loud-spoken indignation of Germany, the Union Jack continued to fly over Cologne for a little longer.

In April an event occurred whose significance was only too apparent. The first German President, the ex-saddler, Ebert, had died, and after one inconclusive election for his successor, the Nationalists had put forward that aged Junker, Field Marshal von Hindenburg, who by a narrow, but sufficient majority, succeeded. The return of the victor of Tannenberg to

the head of affairs was a sufficiently plain intimation that Germany was beginning to harbour dreams of resurrection. But the prophets of smooth things were somewhat consoled when nothing very startling proved to be the immediate sequel. After all, they argued, Hindenburg had sworn to guard the Republican Constitution, and Hindenburg was an honourable man. What sort of the defence this new Hindenburg Line would be in the day of trial, time would show.

There had been other evidences of the way in which the unclean spirit of Prussian Nationalism, that the Allies had fought to exorcise, was beginning to regain its old ascendancy. For as long as the Allies themselves gave harbour to a similar spirit, it was merely a case of Satan attempting to cast out Satan. There were already beginning to emerge two sharply conflicting schools of thought from the welter of German politics. There were those who still remained loyal to the Republican Constitution and the Liberal ideas it embodied, *and these still hoped against hope*, by a policy of peaceful co-operation and fulfilment of the Treaty, to obtain relief, by gradual consent, from what every German regarded as its intolerable burdens. But there were also the out and out Nationalists, who believed in a military tyranny wielding a policy of blood and iron in the good old style of Bismarck and Frederick. Their object was not only to tear the Treaty to shreds, but to fulfil all the old ambitions that had made Germany the terror of the world. For the moment, this revived Nationalism pinned its hopes to an alliance with that known enemy of the League and Western Civilization, Bolshevik Russia.

So far its successes had been in the congenial field of murder. Erzberger and Rathenau had paid the price of their determination to seek peace and ensue it. The Kapp Putsch had failed, as well as a later attempt at Munich, in which the famous Ludendorff had condescended to association with a certain ex-house-painter, not even a German, but a demagogue



way, to earn the blessing pronounced upon peace-makers. Hardly less important was the influence and advice of the British Ambassador at Berlin, Lord D'Abernon.

It was only after long and tedious negotiations that the delegates of the various Powers concerned were brought together on the lovely shores of Lake Maggiore, at the little Swiss town of Locarno, and the series of treaties was signed which, it was hoped, would lay firm the foundations of European peace for a long time to come.

The perpetual guarantee, originally proposed, of the Franco-German frontier, was extended to include that of Belgium. Belgium, Germany and France solemnly undertook never to go to war against each other, and in case of any one of them flagrantly violating this provision, England and Italy undertook to come to the aid of the aggrieved party. As for her Eastern frontier, Germany did not abandon her claims to an eventual revision, but she solemnly pledged herself not to seek this by force of arms, and she also concluded treaties for the arbitration of all disputes—not even excluding those involving the elastic entity known as national honour—with Poland and Czechoslovakia. Further treaties of mutual guarantee against aggression were signed between these two Powers, respectively, and France. And it was understood that the sequel to the settlement should be Germany's entry into the League of Nations, a point on which, curiously enough, she was less insistent than France herself. To the German Nationalist, indeed, the League and all its works were anathema.

This settlement, to which the delegates put their signatures on Mr. Chamberlain's birthday, October the 16th, was hailed throughout the ex-Ally countries as good tidings of great joy. At Locarno itself there had been cordial and symbolic fraternization. "We are all," as M. Briand had put it to his German colleague when they went on the lake together, "in the same boat now." Mr. Chamberlain's return was a

triumph, both in Paris and in London, and he was awarded the Garter for his services. This time, nobody seemed to have any doubt about the world's great age beginning anew. Everyone was talking of the Locarno spirit, the union of hearts between enemies, the agreement to forgive and forget. Now at last the War was really liquidated, and the war-spirit exorcized.

The reception accorded to Locarno in Germany was more qualified. The whole growing strength of Nationalism was thoroughly hostile both to the Locarno guarantees and the Locarno spirit. Nationalists had no desire whatever to perpetuate the existing state of things, or to enter the League, which stood for their perpetuation. Nor were they minded to postpone, for a moment longer than necessary, the settlement of the heavy account with France, and the achievement of all, and more than all, of what Germany had forfeited in the way of frontiers, colonies, and wealth, at Versailles. As long as that detested treaty continued to be honoured, there could be at best only a truce, and anything that had even the appearance of willing consent to the system of things it had established was as the sin of treason. Acceptance was, indeed, forced through the Reichstag, less in the Locarno spirit, than as a means of getting the Allies out of Cologne. Stresemann might have earned the gratitude of Europe, but he had done himself no good in his own country.

And the exuberant optimism with which the settlement had been greeted in England—how far was that justified? What did Locarno really mean? The answer of the average man would have been comprehended in the one word, "peace," and peace was what Englishmen, almost without exception, desired above every other blessing. Locarno was regarded as the completion of the work that the Dawes Plan had begun, and the return to gold had continued, of stabilizing peace. The nations at last knew where they were, and like planets that had been dragged out

of their courses by the passing of some strange sun, they had found new orbits in which to revolve. Now that the result of the War had been finally decided, it would be possible, without fear or friction, to settle down to the enjoyment of a new era of peaceful prosperity, in which all nations alike should participate.

To achieve this desirable state of things, to what commitments had Britain actually pledged herself? It was already a matter of history how she had been dragged into the last war by the action of her rulers in committing her, though without any formal pledge, to the support of one of the two great hostile combinations into which Europe was divided. She had now gone further than even Sir Edward Grey would have dreamed. She had made herself responsible for the defence of both the French and Belgian frontiers, without receiving anything in return. German aeroplanes might, one fine night, lay London in ruins, and as far as Locarno was concerned neither France nor Belgium need lift a finger to interfere. But let Paris or Brussels be threatened, and not only the able-bodied manhood, but the whole population of Britain, would be required to plunge into horrors to which those of the last War would seem mild in comparison. If a Locarno system had been established in the previous century, Britain would have been compelled to have joined in the Franco-German War, though on which side is not so clear. When Prussia had been fighting at Sadowa, and France at Magenta, Britain would have been compelled to undertake responsibility for the Rhine line against Prussia and France respectively.

But Britain's responsibilities, though formally limited to Germany's Western Frontier, were, in reality, far more onerous. What was to happen if Germany were to fall, as she undoubtedly hoped to do in due season, upon Poland, for the recovery of the Corridor, or upon Czecho-Slovakia? Was Britain to keep the ring clear by holding back France from attacking Germany in the rear, as she was pledged

to do under the Locarno settlement, or alternative to prevent Germany from hitting back? The one thing that she would not be able to do, with any decency, was to disinterest herself in the quarrel altogether.

It was odd that the friends of peace should have raised such pæans over an arrangement that made almost inevitable that, if it were honoured, Britain would be dragged willy nilly into the next major European conflict, though she might be left alone to bear the brunt of such violence as anyone might choose to offer her. But if the average man had been capable of analysing his own thoughts, it would almost certainly have turned out that he had never seriously contemplated the possibility of his being called upon in his own person, to honour the Locarno guarantee. He was as ready to induce his neighbours to shake hands all round and be friends, by pledging himself to take action in an event that he never visualized as being remotely likely to happen, as one might be to back the bills of a friend whose solvency one believed to be above suspicion. How could Germany, with her army cut down to a police force, ever dream of attacking France? And why should France, with her fears removed and the Reparations business settled on an agreed basis, want to attack Germany?

The assumption was, that all would continue for the best in the best of all possible worlds, or rather, that Britain and her late Allies could now settle down to enjoy the best of both worlds. The settlement of Versailles would be maintained substantially intact with the goodwill of a disarmed Germany. Money would continue to circulate from America to Germany and thence back through Europe to America, and everyone would put it in his purse and be happy. Everything, in fact, was settled.

But, in fact, though everything had been patched up for the moment, nothing whatever had been settled. The perpetual, accelerated motion of the Dawes machine was bound to end, sooner or later, in a crash

and collapse of its whole system. The vast inferiority complex planted in the German soul was not to be removed by a few diplomatic civilities. Not even the supreme humiliation of the Rhineland occupation, apart from the Cologne sector, was terminated as the result of Locarno; and Germany's reception into the League, with a permanent seat on the Council, instead of being a spontaneous gesture of reconciliation, was held up by an ignoble row, because first a greedy Poland, then a haughty Spain, and finally a slightly ridiculous Brazil, insisted on standing out for equal privileges.

No doubt Germany welcomed a breathing space to recruit her resources and re-equip her factories with the money so hopefully advanced by her American creditor. It was better to start by spoiling the Egyptians peaceably, so long as they would consent to the process. But Germany was only recruiting her strength for the next and more serious step. When the golden stream ceased to flow, it would be time to look to her iron. And when that day came, the ever-growing strength of Nationalism would easily thrust aside, or crush out of existence, such friends of peace and freedom as Stresemann and his like. Then would be the time for the German Samson to rise and snap the bonds with which his enemies had sought to bind him.

And when that day came, what would be the effect of Locarno on Britain? And more important still, how would France stand? For there was one question—and that the most important of all—to which not even the French intelligence dared frame a decided answer. If, and when, in the fullness of time, Germany should start to re-arm in defiance of Versailles, would France dare to grasp the nettle by attacking her promptly before she had gathered enough strength to make the operation impracticable? And in that case what would Britain do? And what Italy?

Locarno or no Locarno, there could have been no

serious question of the British army falling in on the Western Front to assist the Hun in another invasion of France or Little Belgium—for once war has started, one cannot limit oneself or one's allies to a passive, defensive rôle. There are limits to what the British people, or even the British soldier will stand, and any statesman who attempted to honour such an obligation would be strung up to the nearest lamp-post in Whitehall. Under any circumstances, England would be bound to find some excuse—and such excuses are seldom hard to find—for declining to take up arms on behalf of Germany against France, whatever Mr. Chamberlain might have pledged her to at Locarno.

But it was never likely to come to this, for the sufficient reason that France, by herself being party to Locarno, had renounced so explicitly any intention of again crossing the Rhine, as to render such action a moral impossibility under any circumstances whatever. Even if Britain were to take up the position that Germany, by breaking her obligations, contracted at Versailles, had absolved England from hers contracted at Locarno, this would not be any shield to France from the probable outraged and interested determination of Italy to honour her own obligations unconditionally. And with what grace could England intervene to stop her.

To the very shrewd and determined men who were planning another German liberation, similar to that from Napoleon's sway, Locarno must have signified precisely this—that sooner or later Germany would be able to repudiate the disarmament clauses of Versailles, and do it without interference from France. When that day came, Locarno would assume a very different complexion. Under these circumstances, one would have imagined that France's only policy would have been to have pressed on with the scheme of disarmament to which she, along with the other Versailles signatories, was pledged, and which, with her still overwhelming military predominance as a

bargaining counter, she could no doubt have arranged under conditions calculated to guarantee for her the maximum of attainable security. Better by agreement now, than by the will of Germany later on. But France, or rather the politicians who constituted the personnel of her kaleidoscopic ministries, had neither the will, nor perhaps the capacity, for envisaging the situation clearly, and planning, not for the moment, but for a by no means remote future. They preferred to stick to their rôle of inverted Micawbers, and wait complacently for the inevitable *not* to turn up.

## CHAPTER X

### RED FRIDAY

After the great coal strike of 1921, comparative peace descended upon the Labour world. The collapse of the so-called Triple Alliance, on Black Friday, had put a damper on the movement for Direct Action, and for four years there was no conflict of the first magnitude between Capital and Labour. This was partly due to the fact that the coal industry had entered upon another period of that deceptive and temporary prosperity that battens upon the misfortunes of others. In 1922 there had been a coal strike in the United States, and in 1923 the German industry had been stricken with paralysis by M. Poincaré's invasion of the Ruhr. The depression that had settled on the English mining districts was relaxed; the export trade looked up again; and even with the seven hour day, there were jobs, at a living wage, in comparative abundance.

The coming into office of a Labour Government had a certain tendency to relax the strain on the Industrial front. The astonishing spectacle of the machinery of State controlled by their own representatives, had raised hopes among the industrial wage-earners of revolutionary changes in the social order. So long as Mr. MacDonald and his colleagues were at the helm, these hopes were centred in Parliamentary action. Not unnaturally, the overwhelming defeat of Labour, first in Parliament and then at the polls, produced a violent revulsion of feeling, especially as throughout the Party it was proclaimed, and believed, that the pitch had been queered by the



forgery of the Zinovieff letter. At the same time the Parliamentary leaders, who had counselled and practised moderation when in office, and had so palpably failed even to redeem their election pledges, forfeited a great deal of their prestige with the rank and file. There was a demand for fighting leaders and the achievement of revolution, not by constitutional means, but by the direct and concerted action of the Unions themselves.

Hitherto the leaders of the great Unions had been, for the most part, men of a cautious and moderate disposition, who were more accustomed to holding in check than to stimulating the fighting instincts of their followers. It was therefore a portent of alarming significance when the Miners' Federation chose for its Secretary a violent and professed Bolshevik. This was when Mr. Hodges, who, in spite of his proved ability, had never been forgiven by the extremists for his association with Black Friday, resigned that office to become a Civil Lord of the Admiralty in Mr. MacDonald's Government, and was succeeded by a certain Mr. Arthur Cook, a Somersetshire man, who, like so many other fighting leaders of the Post-war era, was a master of emotional oratory, an art that he practised, literally, in his shirt sleeves. He was about as absolute a contrast as could be imagined with the cold and inhuman calculators who had been the leaders of the original Bolshevism. Indeed, his eloquence was said to have derived no small part of its inspiration from Little Bethel. Bolshevism probably meant no more to him than the most out-and-out fighting extremism that he could possibly imagine. It was a matter less of philosophy than of temperament. He was that sort of man.

So he proclaimed himself a disciple of Marx and a follower of Lenin, as if these two names were a sort of swearwords, that would express his personality with the maximum of emphasis. And in case there should be *any* mistake about it—or him—he had taken care to announce, on assuming the Secretary-

ship, that he was redder than ever. At any rate, he was quite clear about the sort of policy he intended to promote. He had already indicated that the last thing he wanted to attain was the prosperity of the mining industry on a basis of co-operation between Capital and Labour. He was out to smash the Capitalist System, and until that happy consummation was attained, to render it completely unworkable. With a man in this mood it is as impossible to negotiate as with a hungry tiger.

Not that the owners themselves were models of sweet reasonableness. If they found themselves confronted with the phenomenon of Mr. Cook, he was no more than they had deserved. Even among their fellow employers, they were known to be the most reactionary and impracticable of their class. They had not the least idea of adapting their industry to hard times by a constructive scheme of reorganization. Their one idea for cheapening the cost of their product was to take it out of the miner's standard of living by a reduction of wages or a lengthening of hours. The result was that between the men's Federation and the employers' Association, there existed none of that goodwill to the adjustment of differences that obtained in such great industries as those of cotton and railway transport. They hated each other cordially, and took no trouble to disguise it.

Meanwhile the bad times, that had been staved off for a couple of years, were settling down, worse than ever, upon the mines. The end of the Ruhr adventure and the new lease of life granted to German industry under the Dawes plan, were again bringing home to Britain the stark reality of the prospects for her leading industry. There was no longer the demand for British coal that there had been before the War, and this state of things was, as far as human foresight could penetrate, likely to get worse rather than better. Coal had ceased to be the unquestioned monarch of industry. The internal combustion engine was taking over more and more of the work of steam. In the

South American market, for instance, the competition of oil was even more serious than that of coal from the United States. Again in Germany, one of Britain's best customers before the War, the substitution of lignite was an important factor in reducing the demand for coal. And even where coal was retained, it was required in proportionately less quantities, owing to the many economies in its use that were the result of scientific progress. A house of any size, centrally heated, makes a less demand on the coal merchant than one in which fires are blazing on every hearth—to take the homeliest of many instances.

By the middle of 1925, the situation in the industry had become desperate. In 1924, the amount of coal exported from England was slightly over 3 million tons less than the average of the five last years before the War. In 1925 that deficit was multiplied almost fivefold.<sup>1</sup> The number of unemployed miners, which had been 38,000 in May, 1924, had risen by May, 1925 to 199,000, and in June leapt up to 301,000.<sup>2</sup> More and more pits were being closed down, and the industry was being run, on the existing wages agreements, at a loss. Bankruptcy stared it in the face.

It may have been observed that the enormous leap up in the numbers of unemployed miners had taken place in the first month in which the effects of Mr. Churchill's return to gold had time to be felt. Amid so many causes depressing the industry, it is hard to disentangle the effect of any one, and it would certainly be an exaggeration to talk as if the gold standard were the sole or even the principal villain of the piece. The depression was not confined to the British industry, but affected, in a greater or less degree, every coal-producing country in Europe, and the Royal Commission, reporting in the spring of 1926, merely diagnosed some temporary ill-effect of the return to gold, and added that "this factor has now ceased to be of primary importance." But when a

<sup>1</sup> *Report of Royal Commission on the Coal Industry* (1925), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Annual Register* (1925), p. 68.

patient is fighting for his life, it takes a very slight tilt to upset the balance. Mr. Churchill's move, whatever proportion of blame may be attached to it, at least could not have been timed more unhappily.

Even if the owners had been as wise as serpents, and Mr. Cook and his fellow-leaders as peaceable as doves, it would have taxed their utmost joint resources to have reconciled the conflicting claims of solvency, and the men's standard of living. With the foreign demand diminished by more than a fifth from the Pre-war standard, the numbers of men competing for jobs in the industry had risen by over 10 per cent., the hours of work underground had been reduced from 8 to 7, and finally, by an agreement in 1924, the wage bill had been substantially increased. With the industry running at a loss, it was hardly conceivable that without some lengthening of hours or sacrifice of wages it would be possible for it, out of its own resources, to avoid so wholesale a closing down of pits as would have thrown perhaps the majority of miners on to the dole.

It was a desperate situation for everybody concerned, and one that called for the most unselfish co-operation between masters and men if its hardships were to be minimized. But neither side had any other remedy than that of the skipper and the deck-hand, cast adrift in a waterlogged boat, who, instead of baling it out, close in a death grapple and endeavour to throw each other overboard. The owners, on the last day of June, gave a month's notice of their intention to terminate the existing wages agreement, and proposed an alternative arrangement, which, though its exact effect was not very obvious, would certainly have involved a reduction of wages. The miners not only rejected the proposals out of hand, but refused even to negotiate with the owners until they were withdrawn. This being refused, the situation was a complete deadlock, with what bade fair to be the greatest industrial war in the history of the country was timed to break out at the beginning of August.

Not even Mr. Cook, and certainly not the President of the Miners' Federation, Mr. Herbert Smith, a hard-headed Yorkshireman, can have seriously imagined that it would be possible to force the owners to maintain wages out of money that the industry was not paying, by such suicidal tactics as a strike in the trough of a depression. But the scope of their vision was not confined to the horizon of the coal industry. The miners would keep their jobs and get their money, and what the industry could not pay, they would call on the whole body of the nation's taxpayers to stand and deliver. And they would back their demand with a threat even more formidable than that of the triple strike weapon that had broken in their hands on the Black Friday of 1921. This time they would mobilize the whole force of organized Labour. A majority of the electorate might choose a Tory or any other Government, but when the whole economic life of the country was brought to a standstill, it would be seen who was the real master.

That Mr. Cook should be able to impose this Marxian logic upon the most potent, grave, and reverend signors who stood at the head of the Labour Party and of the other great Trades Unions, might well have seemed to transcend the bounds of possibility. But the wild man had, in this instance, judged the situation correctly. It is true that Mr. MacDonald was an open disbeliever in the General Strike weapon, and that most of the responsible leaders were openly or tacitly in agreement with him. It is true also that these leaders had enough weight in the political counsels of the Party to be able to get the Communist heresy put under its official ban.

But there was now developing a remarkable and definite cleavage between the political and the industrial sides of the movement. Labour organized in its Unions spoke in a more formidable voice than that of Labour organized politically. All the baffled *fighting spirit*, all the bitter feeling that had been accumulating since the election, were able to find

expression, and dictate the policy of what after all was the nearest approach to a Union of Soviets that Britain could produce, in the Trades Union Congress and its General Council. By what spirit that Congress was dominated, was suggested in the Autumn by the fraternal reception it accorded to the Bolshevik emissary, M. Tomskey, and the applause with which it greeted not only his harrangues, but those of such out-and-out English Communists as Mr. Harry Pollitt.

This spirit only needed some powerful emotional stimulus, such as that afforded by the hard case of the miners, to gather a force that it would be impossible for the elder statesmen of Labour to withstand. Their position was by no means easy. They dared not incur the reproach of another Black Friday. The demand was for fighting leaders, and unless they were prepared to satisfy it by turning their backs on their followers and proceeding in the direction of the enemy, they would be replaced by others of more accommodating disposition. Perhaps when the enemy machine guns had done enough execution, it would be time to take charge, and bring what was left of the army out of action.

With a rapidity that took the Government and country completely by surprise, the situation developed exactly on the lines that Mr. Cook had foreseen and intended. Even before the fateful month of July, negotiations had been on foot for a fighting alliance of the Trades Unions. The indignation excited by the owners' proposals brought these to fruition. The General Council made clear its support of the miners even in their refusal to negotiate. And on the last day of the month, a Conference, a thousand strong, of delegates from the various Unions, authorized a committee of nine to marshal their whole forces for the expected conflict, the first step being a refusal to handle coal on the railways or at the docks.

Meanwhile, what steps were being taken by Mr. Baldwin and his Government to deal with this crisis,

that was more and more plainly developing into a class war in which the whole nation, and not merely one particular industry, was destined to be involved? It was the supreme test of Mr. Baldwin's statesmanship. He had begun well, by making a stand against the reactionary and extremist elements in his own party. As early as March, he had made it clear that he was determined to regard his office as a trusteeship of the nation, and not merely for his own party caucus. A Bill had been brought forward by Mr. Macquisten, a *Conservative back-bencher*, with the by no means indefensible purpose of making it impossible for Trades Unionists to be required to contribute to the funds of the Labour Party, unless they had formally contracted so to do. But Mr. Baldwin turned it down, not on its merits, but because, as he said, his Government had been returned to office under the impression that it stood for peace between all classes of the community. And because it stood for peace, it was not going to push home a political advantage, or to fire the first shot. It was one of those rare speeches that lift politics above the level of a skin game between parties, and it tended to increase the respect with which Mr. Baldwin was already regarded in the country. But it met with no response among the section in the Trades Unions that was pressing forward towards an intensified class war, and only served to intensify the vendetta against Mr. Baldwin amongst the reactionaries and hundred-per-cent party men on his own side. The concessions to the aged and widows in Mr. Churchill's Budget finally convinced these worthies that Mr. Baldwin was no better than a Socialist and a traitor. The barrage of the stunt Press, which had been lifted during the election, was put down again with drum-fire intensity. Everything that Mr. Baldwin did or refrained from doing, everything that he was or into which he could be written up, had become a greater offence than ever to the gods of Fleet Street.

As the situation in the coal mines became acute, the

position of the Government became one of extraordinary difficulty. It could not drive the men by force down the pits, or compel the owners to employ men they did not want at wages they could not afford. By premature intervention it might do more harm than good. After the owners' denunciation of the wage agreement, it tried in vain to bring the parties together. It hurriedly set up a Court of Enquiry that that was barely tolerated by the owners and boycotted outright by the men. It might as well have enquired into the state of the canals on Mars, for all the attention that was paid to it.

Was the Government, under these circumstances, to wash its hands in despair of the whole business, and let these obviously impracticable disputants have the fight for which they were spoiling? For it was rapidly becoming apparent that there was only one possible alternative, and that was for the owners to pay wages on the reduced scale that they proposed, for the miners to receive them on the old scale on which they insisted, and for the Government to put its hand in the taxpayer's pocket to make up the difference. Here was at least a proposal which the most reactionary owner could join with Mr. Cook himself in applauding. For it amounted to subsidizing both profits and wages in this one industry at the expense of every taxpaying citizen in the country.

Nor was it conceivable that this principle of making up wages out of taxes, if it were once applied, could be restricted to the benefit of one industry alone. If coal, why not shipbuilding or transport or any other industry to which depression might bring hard times? And why, in the name of fair play, should not the whole force of militant Trades Unionism be employed to back each and every such demand? How, short of bankruptcy, could there be an end to this process, once it was started?

It is no wonder that Mr. Baldwin, as late as the 29th of July, informed the miners' representatives



that under no circumstances could he consent to the *granting of a subsidy*.

But it turned out that he had spoken too hastily. He and his Government had only too plainly been taken by surprise. They had not counted on being faced, almost without warning, with so fearful a situation as would be involved in a stoppage of the whole economic life of the country. Mr. Baldwin must have realized that without the most careful preparation, the result might be sheer chaos, and privation such as had not even been experienced during the German submarine blockade. It was characteristic of him that he had allowed his wish for peace to assume a corresponding desire in those who, when he spoke to them thereof, made ready for battle. So unwilling had he been to fire the first shot, that he had not even loaded the gun.

It was equally characteristic of him that he should quite frankly have faced up the new situation, without bothering about consistency. At the last moment he decided to gain a breathing space, at all costs, until a Royal Commission had had time to act as an impartial umpire and discover a way out of the impasse. It might be, even now, that reason would prevail, and the catastrophe of a General Strike be averted. If that hope failed, at least the Government and nation would not be caught unprepared.

This involved the granting of the very subsidy that Mr. Baldwin, speaking as trustee for the nation, had only two days before ruled out of the question. For nine months, from the beginning of August to the end of April, the country would be saddled with a burden of £23 millions, as a bribe to mineowners and miners to keep the peace in their industry, and, indirectly, to the federated Unions to abstain from plunging the whole country into industrial war. It was such a surrender to Direct Action as had not been dreamed of in England since the time when Ethelred the Unready had paid Danegeld. The Trades Unions had held the country to ransom by the

mere threat of a strike, and the country, through its elected representatives, had consented to pay the uttermost farthing.

But Mr. Baldwin may, or may not, have remembered that the first monarch to pay Danegeld was not the redeless Ethelred, but Alfred the Great, who had acted not from weakness, but, by gaining time, to ensure that any future demand for Danegeld should be paid in very different coin. He would still continue to seek peace and ensue it by every means in his power. But if peace could only be gained by allowing the extremist majority of the Trades Union Congress to levy any tax it chose on the community—which was precisely what the demand for a subsidy amounted to—then the nine months, so dearly bought, would not be wasted. They would be months of secret, but earnest, preparation.

There was one disadvantage incidental to this very secrecy. The extremists on both sides were now firmly convinced—as no doubt the Viking and Saxon diehards had been about Alfred—that Mr. Baldwin was an amiable weakling who could be squeezed to any extent. The party of direct action was amazed at the swiftness and completeness of its triumph. The stain of Black Friday was effaced. That last day of July, 1925, was christened Red Friday. And the special committee set up to organize the struggle, circularized the affiliated Unions as follows:

“While there is little doubt that the conflict has been avoided, the Trade Union movement must be alert and vigilant in case the necessity should again arise for it to act in defence of its standards.”<sup>1</sup>

There could be no doubt what this was meant to imply. Danegeld, on any future demand, or . . .

<sup>1</sup> *The General Strike*, by R. Page Arnot, pp. 37-8.

## CHAPTER XI

### GENERAL STRIKE

The country heaved a profound sigh of relief when it heard that the unknown terrors of a General Strike had been, at any rate, postponed. The idea of the subsidy did not convey very much to the ordinary citizen, who was content to believe that it would be arranged somehow without making too much difference to his pocket. Mr. Baldwin's inconsistency was readily forgiven by that great majority of Englishmen who desired nothing so much as peace, at home and abroad. These almost certainly included a majority of *Trades Unionists themselves*, who, though they were ready to stand by their class if it came to a fight, were not particularly anxious to burn their own fingers to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the miners.

The Royal Commission, which was set up under the Presidency of Sir Herbert Samuel to enquire into the coal industry, was only appointed after what, under the circumstances, would seem the inexcusably long delay of over a month. But a more competent and impartial body than its four members, backed by five expert assessors, could hardly have been got together. The Government this time avoided the mistake of the *Sankey Commission*, with its four separate reports and its personnel of avowed partizans on both sides, whose verdict preceded the evidence. From the standpoint of the Red extremists, the fact that none of the four was a class-conscious workman was enough to damn their conclusions in advance. But the report, when it appeared, turned out to be a

model of conscientious impartiality. It is safe to say that no one reading it, and not knowing the names of its members, could have detected the smallest bias either way.

Little help was to be had from either of the contending parties. All that the owners had to offer consisted of proposals for sweeping reductions of wages, lengthening of hours, and settlement by districts, proposals so harsh as to shock two aristocratic members of their own body, who formally protested against a policy of depressing the miners' standard of living to the Continental level. As for the miners, they, in conjunction with their Trades Union allies, produced a new and very complicated version of the Socialist panacea of nationalization, which, as it would, at the best, have required years to put into effect, bore little relevance to the needs of the moment.

No blame can attach to the Commissioners that their report was not issued till the 10th of March, a time dangerously close to the fatal 1st of May, when the subsidy was to cease. But the month lost by the Government in appointing them had had the effect of running things much too close. The Commissioners advocated a comprehensive scheme not for the nationalization, but for the reorganization of the industry, by the application of scientific method, and, as a necessary consequence, the amalgamation of the existing chaos of private properties into conveniently large units of production and distribution. They pleaded for a fuller partnership between employers and employed. They pressed for the removal of a grievance that was more sentimental than practical, by the State purchase of mining royalties.

On the most vital question of all, that of the immediate steps to be taken, they rejected altogether the owners' proposals for lengthening hours and for district instead of national settlements. But, since they rejected the principle of a subsidy and recognized that the costs of labour must be reduced somehow,

they admitted, though regretfully, the need for a certain reduction of wages below the 1924 level. Short of retaining the subsidy, it is difficult to see what better bargain they could have proposed for the men.

It was now that Mr. Baldwin's statesmanship was to be put to the supreme test. He was known to be the most liberal-minded Conservative Premier since Disraeli; he had made it clear that the dearest wish of his heart was for Englishmen, of all classes, to dwell together in unity. Would he now have strength to make his will for peace prevail over the clamours of the wild men who were driving the country into strife? Could he—which was most important of all—curb the extremist element in his own Cabinet and party?

It is only too fatally easy to be wise after the event, but one finds lacking in Mr. Baldwin's handling of the situation just that touch of inspired leadership that alone might have saved it. The Report was before him—the decision of the umpire he had himself appointed. He might have accepted it frankly and unconditionally, and have devoted the whole energies of his Government to carrying it into effect, in the teeth of the extremists on both sides. He could have come forward with some alternative solution, and staked everything on that. He did neither. Instead of giving a decisive lead, he made a bargaining offer to accept the Report, in spite of his unconcealed disagreement with certain of its provisions, provided that the other parties accepted it too. He might as well have scrapped it altogether.

From this point it was evident that Mr. Baldwin was as powerless as anybody else to stem the drift to a General Strike. He could only stand his ground and fight it out, with the confidence, this time, of having might as well as right on his side in resisting any further attempt of a part of the community, however powerful, to levy tribute on the whole. For now the Government had its plans fully matured, and

its organization perfected, for dealing with the expected emergency. That was no more than the duty of the most peace-loving Administration, but one is compelled to add that a section of the Conservative Party, and even of the Cabinet, desired nothing better than to have it out once for all with the Unions. What pressure this was able to exert on Mr. Baldwin awaits revelation.

Equally helpless, and much less fortunately placed than the Premier, were those political chiefs of the Labour Party who realized the disaster into which they were being led, or, more accurately, constrained to lead. The very success of Red Friday had given such an impetus to the extremist drive on the industrial front, as it would have required an altogether exceptional strength of leadership to check. The fact that the walls of Jericho had fallen at the first blast of the trumpet, and that the Government had collected from the nation, for three-quarters of the year, the utmost that even Mr. Cook could have demanded, had not unnaturally created an impression that the method of extraction was one that could be applied indefinitely, and that the Unions had only to ask for a subsidy for one to be granted. Who were Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and his Shadow Cabinet to deprive Labour of this rare and refreshing fruit that was to be had for the plucking? Especially when the most reactionary Capitalist organs never ceased to assure them that the Prime Minister was half a Socialist and wholly a weakling, incapable of withstanding any pressure! It was with the same sort of tales that the German militarists had beguiled themselves, in 1914, into believing that under no circumstances could, or would, the British Empire stand in their path across Belgium.

One cannot help suspecting that the Conservative diehards were not the only people who secretly desired that the extremists of the Labour movement should have their bluff called. Let them ring their tocsin—they would be wringing their hands soon!

And then, perhaps, one might get back to practical politics under sane leadership.

If there had been any hope of a settlement, it would have been dashed by the attitude of Mr. Cook. He lost little time in crystallizing the minimum demands of the miners into a slogan, or thought-saving incantation, of "Not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay." That meant, of course, that the whole Report was so much waste paper. Even Mr. Cook's not particularly lucid intelligence must have realized that his slogan amounted to a demand for the subsidy to be made permanent, as that was the only conceivable way in which the miners could be kept in employment on such terms. Failing that, they would *strike, and call upon their fellow Unionists to come to their assistance*. And what leader would now dare to say "no," or, if he did, to get that refusal endorsed by his followers? The impasse was absolute.

For Mr. Baldwin was now adamant in his determination that, after the nine months' of the original subsidy were over, there should be no more raids on the taxpayer's pocket, unless it were some small, temporary advance to be conceded for the sake of easing the transition to an agreed settlement. In future, the coal industry, like every other, must find means of standing on its own legs. There could be no question of allowing it to become permanently parasitic on the country, as, in fact, it had been since last August. As the Government viewed the situation, Mr. Cook's slogan, with the General Strike to back it, had become a plain demand upon the community of "Your money or your life." It was a straight issue between no surrender and Red revolution.

The course of events was almost exactly similar to that of nine months before. The owners offered to abide by various items of the report, but only with large reservations and ambiguities, and without conceding the principle of national agreements. The miners stood fast on their slogan. The owners dis-

closed the drastic wage cuts that they proposed to enforce by the end of the month. This had the effect of producing a complete deadlock. It was only on the 22nd, with eight more days to run, that the Government made any attempt to intervene. Four more days elapsed in futile marking of time before the Industrial Committee of the Trades Union Congress was invoked to assist in bringing the parties together again, a feat that was accomplished on the 28th, with no more fruitful results than before.

On the 29th, there was another conference, a thousand strong, of Trades Union Representatives, which, on the initiative of the pacific Mr. Thomas, passed a motion authorizing the continuance of negotiations, provided the owners would withdraw their notices of wage cuts, and presumably go on paying wages at subsidy rates, which was just what the owners would not, and probably could not afford to do. So that after some more futile palaver on the 30th, work in the coal mines came to a complete stop on the 1st of May, except for pumping operations and the feeding of the ponies, which the miners, in this respect at least more reasonable than in 1921, were willing to continue.

This was a Saturday. The thought that was in everyone's mind was, "What are the Trades Unions going to do about it?" There was no reason why, for a few more days at any rate, they should not have continued to mediate. The worst they were expected to start by doing was to put an embargo on the handling of coal, as they had been preparing to do on Red Friday. But the fighting spirit had now risen to such a pitch, that anything less than the most drastic action would have been scouted as treason to the cause. Early that afternoon there was a hectic scene at the Trades Union special Conference. The General Strike was to begin on Monday at midnight—that is to say in exactly 34 hours—unless the owners surrendered by withdrawing their notices. The voting was of course unanimous. There was talk, in the best



Prussian strain, about shock troops. *The Red Flag* was chanted in chorus. Among the choir was Mr. Ramsay MacDonald.

On the same day the Government proclaimed a state of emergency. It was an emergency for which it had, this time, its plans cut and dried.

Even now, it is doubtful whether more than a comparatively small minority of Englishmen seriously believed that they would wake up on Monday morning to find themselves in the midst of a General Strike. They felt sure that the crisis would be settled somehow, as it had been settled before. For it was known that during these 34 hours of grace, the Trades Union Council and the Government were in feverish negotiation—doubtless hammering out some formula of compromise, or, at worst, of respite. And indeed, it was only now, for the first time in the negotiations, that the real issue was squarely faced. It boiled down to this—was the subsidy to be continued, yes or no?

The only real chance was that the Government might be induced to prolong the subsidy in order to allow negotiations to continue. But this was out of the question while the Trades Union Council itself was bound fast to the terms of the miners' slogan. Lord Birkenhead, who understood as well as any man how to get a knotty case settled out of court, suggested that the miners should authorize their allies to negotiate on the basis of the Report, and on the understanding that this might involve a reduction of wages. Then, perhaps something more might be doled out for the sake of peace. But Mr. Cook and his colleagues knew themselves to be masters of the situation, and were not going to modify one word of their slogan. It was more than the Trades Union leaders dared, to repudiate them now.

But the negotiations went on, right up to Sunday night. A new thrill was added by the fact that the progress of events was able to be recorded on the radio. It was still known that the Union negotiators were going backwards and forwards between the

miners and the Government. From minute to minute the news of a settlement was awaited. And then a sudden extinguisher fell upon these and all hopes. Everything was over. The Government had broken off negotiations. The mediators had sent to Downing Street and their messenger had been dismissed with this bare announcement. They went to bed with a dazed realization that now there was nothing for it but to put their threat into execution, and go through with this General Strike whose success few of them expected or probably desired.

The ground for the Government's action was that the first shot had already been fired. For among the other measures planned to take place, was a complete suppression of the Press, except for one propagandist organ that the united Trades Unions proposed to run for the benefit of their own cause. All printers were to withdraw their labour. Unfortunately, a few hot-heads of the Natsopas, or Printers' Union, objected to a leading article in the *Daily Mail*, whose contents may be guessed from its title, *For King and Country*, and stopped the paper from appearing by withdrawing their labour. Mr. Baldwin certainly had little enough reason for loving the *Daily Mail*, and would probably have been delighted to be told that it would never appear again. But that was hardly the point. Whatever might be thought of the standards of newspaper journalism or the power of the millionaire Press bosses, the claim to deprive the public of all its customary means of information by the arbitrary fiat of the Trades Unions, represented a tyranny such as had not hitherto been dreamed of in England. But we cannot help feeling that if the Government had really been ingeminating peace in the spirit of Mr. Baldwin's previous appeals, it might have waited to demand an explanation from the Union Leaders, and given them an opportunity to bring these too eager storm troops of theirs to heel. But it is evident that there was a section of the Cabinet that was itself spoiling for a fight. These men knew the strength

of the organization that had been so carefully built up during all these months, and felt that they could take up the challenge with the certainty of defeating it. And it would appear that Mr. Baldwin was as powerless to hold them in leash, as Mr. MacDonald, on his side, was to curb the fighting passions of his own extremists. It was rumoured, and in fact openly stated, that the Premier had been threatened with several resignations if he stood parleying any longer.

In any case, it is scarcely conceivable that even if the negotiations had been prolonged all night, they could have led to the strike orders being countermanded in the morning. All that the Trades Union negotiators could, or dared do, was to parley for an extension of the subsidy, and unless the miners were prepared to make concessions on their side, such an extension would have been merely Danegeld without the departure of the Danes. And the miners were not budging an inch—they were almost ostentatiously unconcerned with all this fluttering backwards and forwards between themselves and the Government. To such a mentality as Mr. Cook's, the failure of the General Strike, at the last moment, to materialize, would probably have seemed a disaster worse than that of Black Friday.

And so, on Monday morning, those who lived within earshot of the railways listened in vain for the familiar noises, and realized, with a not quite unpleasurable thrill, that the thing had really happened—war had been declared on the industrial front, with all its unknown and alarming possibilities. The invisible mechanism by which daily life was maintained had suddenly ceased to function. It is true that the Trades Unions had made an offer of running a food service on the railways, but only on condition of their being accorded a veto on the use of the railways for purposes that they might consider inimical to the success of the strike. Even they can hardly have imagined that such a proposal would have been taken seriously.

The situation was now the exact reverse of what it had been nine months ago. Then it was the Government that had been caught unprepared. Now it was the Unions that had blundered unadvisedly into a struggle against a fully prepared enemy, and under leaders whose only idea was not to win, but to get the thing over and done with as soon as possible. Their one success was at the outset, in the extraordinarily complete response of the rank and file to the appeal to down tools. Never was there more striking proof of the strength of the team spirit, under modern conditions. That the majority of those who came out were anxious to forfeit their wages and imperil their jobs to get the miners their subsidy, is hardly in accordance with what we know of human nature. But the rank and file felt that they were called upon to play up for their side, and, like Napoleon's *grogards*, they "grumbled but went."

Few of them certainly had any revolutionary intentions, or had probably gone very deeply into the exact issues at stake. In fact the leaders themselves had started with the typically English disadvantage of having failed to think out, or at any rate to disclose, the full implication of their proceedings. They vehemently, and perhaps sincerely, protested, that the strike had no political objects, that it was a purely industrial dispute, and so forth. As if the best way to get a Welsh coal owner to revise his wage lists were to take away his morning newspaper and to deny him the use of the General Omnibus from Seven Kings to Cricklewood! The plain fact of the matter was that the community was expected to go on subsidizing the mining industry out of taxes, as it had been doing for the last nine months, and that the Trade Unions were out to create such an intolerable situation for the community that it would be constrained to pay up, and to go on paying lest a worse thing should befall it. The surrender demanded was not from the mineowners, but from the Government and Parliament—that, and nothing less.

There was another thing that the leaders of the *General Strike* had failed to think out. In striking at the community they were striking first and hardest at their own followers. By paralyzing supply and transport, they were injuring the poor man far more than the Capitalist, injuring him doubly when they cut off his wages by making him down tools. The poor man's bus was taken off the road, his third-class carriage lay idle in the sidings, while the rich man continued to get about as usual in his car. If food soared to fancy prices, the rich man would be able to pay them. If it ran short altogether, he would at any rate find means of consuming the last crust. There is no profounder truth, in the twentieth century, than that war is suicide, but the form of offensive tactics known as a general strike is suicide in the mere hope of inconveniencing the enemy.

Even during the first day it began to be realized that the authors of the strike had miscalculated. Neither the Government nor the community showed the faintest sign of being coerced into surrender. The Government's plan for maintaining the vital services proved to be both comprehensive and adequate. The whole country was divided into districts each under its commissioner, and an organization, thought out to the last detail, sprang into being. There had, during the months of subsidy, been a widely advertised attempt to form an unofficial scheme for maintaining necessary services, under Lords Jellicoe, Hardinge, Lloyd, and other prominent leaders. This proved totally unnecessary. The Government's own plan required no supplement, and volunteers, for whom there was an instant call, would be assigned their places in the national defence scheme. The whole able-bodied manhood of the upper and middle classes was tumbling over itself with eagerness to serve, and after the first day or two this was reinforced by a steady stream from the working class itself, including a certain proportion of men who were actually on strike, and only too glad to raise the wind

by an unofficial job. The hundreds of thousands who eventually came forward were far in excess of the duties that could be found for them.

The chief of all the things that the strike leaders had left out of account was the power of the internal combustion engine. The "shock troops" they had called out had consisted of those employed in printing, in the heavy industries, and the various forms of shipping and transport. And what was meant for the really decisive manœuvre consisted in the turning off of the nation's steam power, and the consequent paralysis of its railway system. But now the roads, swarming as they were with motor vehicles of all sorts, were capable, at a pinch, of taking the place of the railways. An enormous fleet of private cars was at the disposal of the Government, or prepared to give free lifts to those who could not find trains, and if the bus and lorry drivers left their seats, this was a job that could be easily taken on by enthusiastic amateurs. There were indeed sporadic attempts to deny the use of the King's highway to motor traffic, but these reminiscences of the bold Turpin only served to heighten the fun of the proceedings.

For—and this was the most galling part of all—once the first shock was over, the intended victims of the strike found the whole thing hugely enjoyable. It had all the excitement of another war without any of the tragedy. Nobody imagined that it was going to last for long enough to take off the thrill of novelty, and it was a delightful free outing to impersonate a real bus-driver, or policeman, or dock-hand, with the knowledge that you were doing your bit thereby to smash the great General Strike. Luckiest of all were the proud young men who managed to get employment on the railways, and even on the engines—"scabs in Oxford bags" as one infuriated official of the Railwaymen's Union afterwards characterized them, no doubt to their great delight. The present author remembers how a cricket match, which like practically all other fixtures was

going on complacently as usual, was enlivened by the spectacle of a passenger train that was providing a service of its own up and down that particular section of the main line, and must have stopped at the station the best part of a dozen times, at intervals never known to Bradshaw. It was manned by three grinning and waving young fellows, whose efforts to start their engine must have caused untold agony to the real driver, if he had been anywhere about. It was even betting whether the first convulsive jerk would be in a forward or a reverse direction.

Not all the strikers themselves were proof against the infection. At this same station, the entire staff was dutifully on strike. But the entire staff, with the exception of one lone Abdiel, was present, only not officially. This was signified by the fact that they were only partially in uniform, even the substitution of a cloth for a peaked cap being sufficient to signify that they were there by favour and not by order. Tipping, for this motley portage, was on a gratefully lavish scale.

Few of the strikers, who had been called out by the Trades Union Council, had been able to work up that determination, at all costs, to win, that is the essence of the war spirit. There were few atrocities. The worst of all, the attempt to wreck the Scotch express, was the work of miners. A volunteer worker, after the strike was over, was set upon and beaten to death in the Blackwall Tunnel. There was a little rioting here and there, and it became quite a popular amusement to smash the glass of buses, a feat that caused their amateur conductors to placard them with cheery notices in varying degrees of humour. But on the whole, the strike spirit was good-tempered to a degree that astounded Continental and American spectators, who were accustomed to a very different state of affairs in their own industrial disputes. When a message arrived from Moscow, exhorting the strikers to "fight like devils," it caused more hilarity than horror.

The attempt to suppress the newspapers merely recoiled on its authors. Controlling the sources of information is a game that two can play, and it was one in which the Government held all the winning cards. As the Trades Unions had forgotten the motor car, so also had they forgotten broadcasting, that was entirely under Government control, and was fully capable of diffusing such news as the authorities cared to release, and of providing a vehicle for such appeals as they thought desirable. It was a poor achievement to have stopped the *Daily Mail* printing machines, when the impressive, earnest tones of Mr. Baldwin's voice could be heard in every home provided with an aerial, and when, for the sake of strict impartiality, Labour could be made to speak with the voice of Mr. Thomas.

The fact is that the Trades Unions had committed so flagrant and unprecedented an outrage in the stifling of the Press, as to deprive themselves of any leg to stand on in objecting to reprisals. Whether it was right or dignified for the Government to descend even part of the way towards its opponents' level, was another matter, but in war, he is a very exceptional combatant who denies himself the use of weapons, or tactics, employed by his opponent. The war spirit in the Government was embodied in Mr. Churchill, who joyfully left the seat of custom to take command on the propaganda front. Let the Unions do their damndest against a Press that had after all been anything but united in support of the Government—the Government would take the field and hold it with a newspaper of its own. The offices and machinery of the ultra-Tory *Morning Post* were at its disposal.

Mr. Churchill directed operations with his accustomed brilliancy and more than his accustomed success. A new paper, *The British Gazette*, sprang into existence, and in little more than a week had broken all records of circulation. It was, like the organ that the Trades Unions had fondly hoped to substitute for the entire Press, conducted on lines of shameless propaganda.



It had no hesitation in burking even the Archbishop of Canterbury, when he, with the support of the Free Churches, endeavoured to act the part of peace-maker by suggesting that something after all might be conceded in the way of a subsidy. To encourage such hopes, in the Government's view, would only have had the effect of prolonging the struggle. On the other hand, it spared no effort to secure publicity for the very different message of Cardinal Bourne, who thundered from his pulpit at Westminster against the General Strike as a sin against God and man. Meanwhile the other newspapers, with the exception, of course, of the *Morning Post*, had been resurrected in a form rather suggestive of their ancestral broadsheets. The *Daily Mail* leader writer was now calling for the arrest of the Trades Union leaders, and this time there was no Natsopas to apply the gag. The victory on the propaganda front was complete, and it must have been a bitter reflection for those who had plotted to silence the Press, that they alone had rendered it possible.

It was evident that the attempt to hold up the country had miscarried. The Government's scheme was *functioning with dramatic efficiency*. Nowhere was there the faintest sign of the strike extorting the least concession. Nor could the leaders hope to save their faces by some show of compromise, for the Government had announced its intention of having nothing whatever to do with them, till they themselves had called Kamerad, by calling off the strike unconditionally. It was now that frayed nerves and tempers led to some half-hearted but unmistakable attempts to tighten up the hitherto unavowed hunger blockade. Flour millers were called out; the issue of food permits was cancelled, an action that had the effect of putting anybody who dared join in conveying food to the people, under the ban of the Trades Union Council. It was all utterly ineffective, a mere despairing gesture of men who would probably have been horrified if their tactics had been crowned

with the least success. But it served to show what a general strike must inevitably lead to, if pushed to a serious conclusion. A hardly less revealing gesture was the attempt to strike at the House of Commons by depriving it of its electricity supply.

The Government were fully equal to the situation. They quickly took steps to show that there was going to be no nonsense about interfering with food distribution. A spectacular military demonstration was arranged, in order to escort a monster convoy from the docks, where the departure of food lorries had been interfered with. The procession of the Guards, with sixteen armoured cars, a large force of volunteers, and staff officers in red tabs imparting an air of reality to the proceedings, proved wildly popular in the East End, where crowds soon lined up along the route to cheer the soldiers. Terror was degenerating into farce.

But the Government had another battery yet to unmask. The Trades Unions had occupied a position of such power and privilege that hardly anyone had thought of the members of their Council, pronouncing *ex cathedra* the decrees of organized Labour, as ordinary citizens amenable to the law. But what, as a matter of fact, they had been doing, was to incite the members of their Unions, all over the country, to commit flagrant breaches of contract with their employers, by quitting their jobs without notice. Now if this had been merely a criminal offence, the worst that could have been anticipated would have been a few days of glorious and not too uncomfortable martyrdom in one of His Majesty's prisons. But this was a case of civil damages. Not only was every individual striker liable to be sued in the County Court, but the funds of the Trades Unions themselves, and the often quite comfortable savings of their leaders, might be distrained upon to an unlimited amount. For a judgment of Mr. Justice Astbury had now put it beyond question that the strike was illegal, and that the Trades Disputes Act of 1906, the Magna Charta

of the Unions, protected nobody concerned. The very disbursement of strike pay amounted to a misappropriation of trust funds. And what was a very important point, *no man could be deprived of his Union benefits by defying the orders of his executive, and sticking to his job.* This point was driven home in a speech by a distinguished Liberal barrister, Sir John Simon.

The strike had entered on its second week, but the end was obviously near. The leaders were now only anxious to get out of the mess on any terms whatever. Apart from the unpleasant personal consequences threatened to themselves, their experience must have told them that the breaking-point was at hand, and that the trickle of men back to their jobs might at any moment become a stampede, quickened by the fear of unemployment taking the hindmost. All along the line defeat stared them in the face. For want of a better pretext, they grasped at some unofficial proposals put forward by Sir Herbert Samuel, which amounted to frank acceptance of the Report by all parties, with a National Board to sanction any reduction of wages that might prove unavoidable, and a subsidy to ease the transition. Trusting that the Government would see its way to endorsing these terms, the Union chiefs proceeded on the morning of Wednesday, the 10th day of the strike, to No. 10, Downing Street, to make the surrender required of them. It was hardly possible to cut a dignified figure under the circumstances, but Mr. Baldwin was the last man to humiliate a fallen enemy.

The companies against whom, without even the shadow of provocation, the strike had been directed, and whose contracts had been broken, were not disposed to let them off so lightly. They had the whip-hand, and they were determined to exact such terms of surrender as should serve both for a lesson, and a security against any breaking of contracts in the future. The leaders were in no mood to resist, and were probably not at all sorry that this General

Strike business should be knocked on the head once and for all. A fortnight before, nobody could have dreamed it possible that the railwaymen, dockers, busmen, and printers, could have submitted to terms so humiliating and so drastic. They acknowledged publicly that they had done wrong; they solemnly undertook to observe their contracts in future; they admitted their employers' right to claim damages for any future breach; reinstatement was only to take place as soon as work could be found, and was not to extend to those guilty of violence and intimidation. To this it might be added that their ten days' outing had pretty effectually depleted the coffers of the Unions concerned.

The General Strike, the threat of which had so long loomed, like a black cloud, on the horizon, had passed in utter defeat and humiliation. It had been outmanœuvred and outfought. It had revealed, in the community, a power of resistance to dictation that had never been suspected. Nor could it even be said to have failed gloriously. It had developed into an open if half-hearted attempt to impose a hunger blockade on the nation, which had been repulsed as soundly as that of the German U-boat commanders. It had led to the elder statesmen of the Labour Party being openly branded as traitors by its young, fighting bloods. And the policy of Direct Action, which had seemed on the point of capturing the Unions, had been smashed beyond hope of revival for at least a decade. Not only was the General Strike weapon broken and discredited, but, after 1926, a long period of peace in the major industries was secured. Lastly—to anticipate events—the Government was able in the following year not only to strengthen the law against the General Strike, but to cut the claws of the Trades Unions still further by restricting their powers of coercing individuals. And the measure aroused surprisingly less resentment than had been expected.

Mr. Baldwin's star was at its zenith. He had won an even more astonishing victory than that of the

General Election, and without forfeiting his reputation as a lover of peace. But if there is any lesson to be learnt from modern war, it is that victory is only a shade less costly than defeat. And it had yet to be seen whether the man, who had been strong enough to save the Constitution from a danger without parallel in modern times, would have the strength to crown his achievement by a peace that should confirm the victory, not of a class or party, but of the whole nation.

It may be that such an achievement was beyond the bounds of possibility. But it may also be just at this point that Mr. Baldwin's strength failed to sustain him on that level of statesmanlike magnanimity which he had hitherto maintained. Certain it is that the triumph of his Government over the General Strike was followed by the long and lamentable anti-climax of the still unresolved coal stoppage, and that the end of this was a victory not of the nation, or of the impartial settlement advocated by Sir Herbert Samuel and his fellow Commissioners, but of the coal-owners, who were able to starve the miners by inches into submission to the most extreme and brutal of their demands.

It is only too easy to demonstrate that the miners themselves were no injured innocents, but displayed an obstinacy and arrogance that the most hardened Capitalist could not have surpassed. They rejected every overture and blocked every avenue to peace. They repudiated with indignation any part or lot in the concessions advocated by their fellow Trades Unionists. Their leaders rejected out of hand the Government's offer, *after the collapse of the strike, to implement the Report and grant a subsidy of £5 millions in aid of wages.* Mr. Varley, a member of their own executive, and Mr. Frank Hodges himself, were merely snubbed for their pains when they put out feelers for a compromise. But no leaders, however extreme, could be extreme enough to satisfy the requirements of the rank and file. When the executive committee of the

Northumberland miners proposed to negotiate on the basis of the Report, the men balloted down the proposal by a decisive majority. When the Bishop of Lichfield, at the head of a body of Churchmen, put forward peace proposals that actually included a four months' subsidy—a thing that Mr. Baldwin denied any intention of granting, but which he might have been conceivably induced to concede as the price of an assured peace—the whole body of miners rejected it, on ballot, against the advice of their leaders, including the terrible Mr. Cook himself, who now found himself completely powerless to lay the spirit of intransigence that he had been at such pains to raise. Nothing short of actual starvation would induce the miners to consider the slightest departure from the demands of their slogan. They preferred to be bludgeoned into the loss of everything, rather than consent of their free will to the sacrifice of anything. If the country was not prepared to stump up for their wages, it should not have one lump of coal out of the pits, and there was an end of it.

It was an impossible attitude, but so out-and-out an Englishman as Mr. Baldwin might have realized something not unpleasantly familiar in this refusal to know when one is beaten. It was *after all* the spirit that had inspired the famous 46th, the North Midland Division, largely composed of miners, that had achieved the impossible and broken the Hindenburg line by crossing the St. Quentin Canal. And much may be excused to men fighting for a standard of living that was, at the best, exiguous. No doubt it had been the duty of the Government and its leaders to stand like a rock against any attempt to supersede the authority of the State by that of the Trades Unions, or to quarter the mining industry on the taxpayer. But the miners were also British. Their welfare was part of the nation's welfare; even their obstinacy was part of John Bull's original sin. And it had been Mr. Baldwin's proudest title to fame—as well as his unforgivable offence to men whose

abuse was his proudest distinction of all—that he had hitherto persistently refused to sink to the level of a mere party or class leader.

Perhaps for the first time, in allowing himself to be rushed, if rushed he was, by the militants of his Cabinet, into his final and precipitate breach with the Unions, he showed signs of wavering from this high and stern ideal. In the long months that followed before the resistance of the miners was finally stamped out, it seemed, at times, as if he had forgotten it altogether, and blossomed into a hundred-per-cent Primrose Anti-Socialist. Since neither party to the dispute seemed capable of listening to reason, he became more and more obviously determined to wash his hands of the whole business, and let them knock their obstinate heads together until they got tired enough of it to put them together. This was fair enough in the abstract, but what it meant in the concrete was that the owners' bank balances would be pitted against the miners' stomachs, and that the war would resolve itself into a siege in which the garrison had now lost all hope of relief, and in which the besiegers would be satisfied with nothing short of unconditional surrender.

It seems ungenerous to criticize Mr. Baldwin for his failure to dominate so hopeless a situation, but one cannot help a certain feeling of regret that he should have omitted to stand forth, at this crisis, for a settlement truly national, one that should have been enforced, by all the resources at the Government's disposal, upon both combatants and in the teeth of all opposition. The wages might have been reduced, the day might even have been lengthened—but not by a penny or a minute more than absolutely necessary. The owners need have been allowed no privilege beyond what was conceded to them in the Samuel Report; they might have been compelled, if they could not have been persuaded, to reorganize their industry from top to bottom, under pain of having the job taken over for them by the State, and them-

selves dismissed as unfit for their stewardship of the nation's still most vital source of energy. Above all, the nation's interest might have been held paramount, and the idea of a peace being dictated by master to man under stress of privation have been no more tolerated than that of a precisely similar peace being imposed by the Trades Union Council on the nation.

If Mr. Baldwin had only been able thus to rise to the height of his own noble exhortation, at the beginning of the strike, "Keep steady. Remember that peace on earth comes to men of good will", it is conceivable that he might have come, by the free choice of his countrymen, to wield an influence not inferior to that of any continental dictator. The nation had given enough proof, and was to give more in the future, of its longing for a Government that would govern in the interests of no faction or party, but of the whole community, and of a statesman to lead it, whose impartiality, no less than his competence, was above suspicion.

No doubt Mr. Baldwin would have found it difficult, and perhaps impossible, to carry his own colleagues with him in pursuit of such an ideal. The worst of a war, even when it is successful, is that it arouses passions that take a long time to subside, and there were many Conservatives who had frankly identified themselves with the cause of the owners, and wanted to see Mr. Cook and his grimy legions beaten as flat as a pancake. But the man who had twice before jeopardized his career for his principles, would surely not have been afraid to stand up to his own backwoodsmen.

Whatever was the cause, the strong hand on the helm was relaxed—the ship yielded to currents of class and party passion. The sickening and sordid business of driving the miners back to the pits, with wages reduced, hours lengthened, and national settlements abandoned, was not accomplished till the late Autumn. By that time the Samuel Report was as



much a thing of the past as the Geneva Protocol. The miners had insisted on a fight to a finish, and the finish was *vae victis*.

But by this time, the prestige of Mr. Baldwin and the popularity of his Government had slumped to a degree that would have probably ensured their defeat at the polls at any time after the middle of the year. The capture of a Hammersmith seat by Labour from the Conservatives at the end of May, was the first of a series of by-elections that proved how decisively the Government was alienating the sympathy of the urban electorate. Mr. Baldwin stood forth no longer as the leader of the nation, but as the backer of the mine-owners.

What was even worse from the Conservatives' standpoint was that a crushing handicap had now been imposed on the policy of national revival to which their credit was pledged. The combined cost of the subsidy, of the General Strike, and of the coal stoppage, both to the Government and the nation, had been enormous. Trade, and consequently revenue, had suffered cruelly. The unemployment figures, which in the month before the strike had actually dropped below the million mark, soared up again, not counting the strikers themselves, to a peak figure, in June, of 1,639,000, and at the end of the year were still 1,351,000. Mr. Churchill's bad luck had followed him to the Exchequer. His Budget of 1925 had undoubtedly been intended as the first of a memorable series, lightening burdens and scattering benefits. All was now changed. There was no more largesse to distribute, and all the Chancellor's skill would be employed in devising expedients of financial legerdemain, in order to make both ends meet, or seem to meet, without putting back that sixpence which he had taken off the income tax, or depriving the breakfast table of the benefits conferred on it by Mr. Snowden.

Nevertheless domestic tranquillity seemed as firmly assured, after the defeat both of the General and the

coal strikes, as international harmony by the Locarno Treaty and the Dawes Plan. All was quiet, at last, on the Industrial Front, and perhaps it might be assumed that the class war, like the war of nations, was at last liquidated.

even Mr. MacDonald was prepared to relax Britain's grip on the Canal, still less put the Sudanese neck under the Egyptian heel. The negotiations broke down, and affairs were obviously working up for a crisis. There had grown up a habit of assassination, which culminated in November, 1924, in the murder, in open daylight in the streets of Cairo, of the British Sirdar, or Commander-in-Chief, Sir Lee Stack.

This last outrage shocked British public opinion, and the new Conservative Government decided to assert British authority, once and for all, in a way that would put a definite end to any further attempts of this sort. Accordingly an ultimatum was presented to the nominally independent State of Egypt which, as the Italians remarked with approving delight, was as sweeping and arbitrary in its demands as that which they themselves had recently fulminated at Greece after the assassination of one of their own generals. There was this difference, however. The English had the Egyptians so absolutely at their mercy, that there was no question of this particular ultimatum being followed up by bombardment and massacre after the Corfu precedent, still less by a European War, after that of Sarajevo. It was more likely to save life than destroy it.

England was in no mood to do things by halves. Not only were there the familiar demands for apology, punishment, and intervention, but advantage was taken of the opportunity to settle the Sudan question, which had no conceivable connection with that of the Sirdar's murder. It was to be bag and baggage, not for the English, but for the Egyptian forces in the Sudan. They were cleared out, not without some slight trouble, easily suppressed, at Khartoum. But England, having secured her grip on the Egyptian Hinterland, went further, and absolved herself from all limitations on the area to be irrigated by the precious water of the Nile, before it got to Egypt. This was a matter on which Egyptian opinion was extremely, and naturally, sensitive, though it was unlikely that

any material disadvantage was actually suffered by the Egyptian fellaheen. There was the usual ultimatum sabre-rattling, appearance of battleships and seizure of customs at Alexandria. And it is at least satisfactory to record that the Sirdar's murderers were tracked down and duly hung.

After this, it was plain that independent, democratic government in Egypt could not be anything but a farce. England had the whip-hand and was obviously determined to keep it, so long as force was on her side. It only remained to be seen whether the patriots would bow to the brutal facts of the situation, and strike the best bargain they could with the Suzerain Power. But this they could not bring themselves to do, either under the Conservative or even the next Labour Government. The British occupation went on with a steadily-lessening friction, as the habit, if not the spirit of submission, was engendered.

As for Zaghlul, there was no place for him at the head of the Ministry after the ultimatum—and no other Premier, during his lifetime, could be more than a transient and embarrassed phantom. Within three years, he had gone to his grave, mourned by his people, and enshrined in their memory as a national hero. Next year King Fuad took the opportunity of dispensing with Parliament altogether, and governing without it. The tide was setting irresistibly towards an eventual dictatorship—an incongruous and unique phenomenon under British auspices, but perhaps the only logical outcome of the state of affairs in Egypt created by the occupation.

In India, the attainment of even temporary stabilization was an harder affair than in Egypt, partly because of the vast size of the country and the enduring vitality of its civilization, partly because of the extraordinary personality of the Mahatma Gandhi. The tragic events in the Punjab, in 1919, had not in the least weakened his faith in Satyagraha as a means for attaining freedom from the Satanic government of the British. And as he pushed forward with his campaign,

matter. And a golden opportunity presented itself. The proposed Treaty with Turkey, that was never ratified, had aroused a fury of indignation throughout Islam. The Faithful were exhorted to rally to the defence of their Commander, the Sultan. In India this agitation, which was more dangerous than that of the Hindus, as it was more likely to affect the loyalty of the troops, was led by the two brothers, Ali. But how could the Mahatma reconcile his conscience to alliance with a creed whose instrument had never ceased to be the sword? What could Satyagrahis want with a Khalif whose avowed function was to wield that sword against all infidels, not excepting Hindus? But the man who had sat at the feet of Tilak was capable of persuading himself and others that the champions of Islam were genuine converts to the principles of Satyagraha. The accommodating brothers were quite ready to assure him that this was so.

What was the real nature of the spirit to which the Mahatma had just given his blessing, was not long in revealing itself. The Moplah community of Moslems in the uplands of the Malabar coast may have been rude and primitive, but they were at least better informed of the principles of militant Islam than the Mahatma found it convenient to be. They rose in such arms as they could get hold of, and incontinently fell upon all the unfortunate Hindus who happened to be in their reach, murdering, torturing, raping, looting, desecrating shrines, and in fact, behaving precisely as the Pindari and other human scourges had habitually done all over India before the strong hand of Britain had put a stop to their activities.

To this inconsiderate conduct the Mahatma succeeded in turning a Nelson eye, but it was different when the Prince of Wales landed at Bombay, in fulfilment of a royal promise made some time before. The Satyagraha campaign was at its height, and his appearance was the signal for a wild riot, in which the houses of those well-to-do Indians who had

presumed to take part in his reception were attacked by infuriated mobs, and which was only put down after much lamentable bloodshed. Then indeed Mr. Gandhi was horrified, and humbled his soul with fasting. He addressed the citizens of Bombay in terms of grief-stricken indignation. And his rebuke included words of strange self-revelation:

"I have thrown myself into the arms of the Ali brothers, because I believe them to be true and God-fearing men. The Mussulmans have to my knowledge played a leading part during the two days of carnage. It has deeply hurt me. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

But the Mahatma did not stop organizing his campaign of non-co-operation. He could, indeed, do no otherwise if he was to retain his ascendancy over the Indian National Congress, some of whose more ardent spirits were straining at the leash to adopt the methods of good honest violence and murder that had been crowned with such success in Ireland, and few of whose members really appreciated a self-denying ordinance that cut them off from participation, so dear to the politically-minded Indian, in the control of provincial assemblies that were the product of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. The Mahatma was indeed passionately sincere in his desire to preserve the spiritual foundations of his new revolutionary Nationalism, and to keep it pure from any taint of violence. And in spite of the lessons he had received, he still appears to have hoped that he could compass the downfall of the British Raj without shedding one drop of blood.

The new plan was carefully thought out, and constituted authority was to be starved into surrender by the simple refusal to pay taxes, as well as by being comprehensively, but peaceably, ignored in all its functions. If it used force, Satyagrahis, three hundred millions of them, would take no sword but that of the spirit, and fight not otherwise than as the early Christians had fought Rome. The new India would

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches and Writings of M. K. Gandhi*, p. 625.

come serenely into being like a Kingdom of Heaven on earth, free not only from the contamination of alien rule or contact, but from the consecrated intolerance and caste-exclusiveness of traditional Hinduism. In every home, from the Himalayas to the Carnatic, the spinning wheels would be busily turning, and there would be plain, homespun cloth and simple fare and concentration on those things that are not temporal but eternal. And the English, with their Viceroy and civil service and armed men, might haunt this Paradise, ghostlike—maliceful and destructive as every Indian expects ghosts to be, but gradually dissolving phantoms, with no real part in the world of living men.

The Mahatma made no secret of his intentions. He resorted to the now familiar Nationalist instrument of an ultimatum, addressed to the new Viceroy, Lord Reading. In all but the threat of physical violence, this conformed pretty fairly to the accepted model. There was the usual catalogue of accusations, the statement of demands to be complied with under the usual time limit, demands that included freedom, even from the law, for the Khilafat agitation, and that of some Sikh nonconformists, who had also been taken under Mr. Gandhi's wing, and who were trying to capture—not without violence—certain temples of the sect from their officiating incumbents. Even in case of complete surrender, the British authorities were only to be granted a respite from "aggressive Civil Disobedience,"—the words were the Mahatma's—until the non-co-operators, of whom His Excellency was ordered to empty the jails, had had time to meet together and consider the position *de novo*.

This not very tempting offer was ignored, but before the threat of non-violent aggression could be put into force, the excitement created by Mr. Gandhi's agitation had borne dreadful fruit. In a place called Chauri Chaura, one of the tens of thousands of villages dotted about the great Indian Plain, a mob drove the police of the Satanic Government into their

it was, and made it plain to everybody that if there was not to be a reversion to uncontrolled bureaucracy, there must be a further and bolder application of the democratic principle.

And meanwhile, life in the cantonments and in the innumerable villages went on with singularly little apparent change, or sign of what may have been fermenting beneath the surface. The Khilafat agitation had burst like a pricked bubble before the Mahatma had emerged from prison, since not the Briton but the Turk had deposed the Commander of the Faithful and turned his back on Islam. Hindu patriots continued to agitate, and the police to repress them with none too gentle a hand. There was, particularly in Bengal, a handful of desperados who took a leaf out of the Irish book, and sought freedom by murder, but the authorities were, on the whole, capable of holding them in check. India had achieved a kind of stability, though imperfect and transient.

Thus all along Britain's Eastern front there was at least the appearance of equilibrium. In Palestine, her hands were fully taken up with acting as umpire between the Arabs in possession, and the Jews who, flocking back to the Promised Land, regarded them much as their forefathers had regarded the Canaanite. The new States of Iraq and Transjordan had to be put on their feet with advice, capital, and bombing aeroplanes, to protect themselves against the new kingdom of the Islamic homeland, Arabia, now conquered for himself by Ibn Saud, head of the Wahabi sect, which, at a time of apostasy from the Faith, represented the purest and sternest ideals of the Prophet. The first great shock of the Eastern upheaval had been succeeded, except at its far-Eastern end, by a comparative tranquillity, but there were quiverings of the surface and minor shocks here and there—riots, frontier raids, agitation, murder. The volcanic forces were not dead, but gathering for some fresh folding of the surface. And what form this would take, and what part Britain was destined to



play in the shaping of a new Orient, no man could tell.

In all the other parts of the Empire and Commonwealth of Nations, there was nothing to compare in importance to this Eastern drama. It was indeed a time of manifold activity and development—in the year 1926 there was a constitutional crisis in Canada and another in New South Wales, in each of which a British Governor played a part; there was an even more dangerous dispute between Briton and Dutchman in South Africa about the simple matter of including the Jack of a now dissolved Union in a national flag—a dispute eventually solved by a sensible but hideous compromise. But the ordinary Englishman, like Gallio, cared for none of these things, and desired nothing better than to let the daughter nations solve their difficulties in their own way. Probably not one in ten thousand inhabitants of the Home Country could, at any given moment, have named the Premiers of the four great Dominions or the parties they represented. And perhaps in no better way could he have done his bit for the Commonwealth than by this determination, which was fully shared by his rulers, to mind his own business and leave the Colonials to mind theirs.

But one event of surpassing importance did happen in the history, *not of any Dominion or Dependency*, but of the Commonwealth of Nations itself. This was at the Imperial Conference of 1926, the result of whose deliberations is embodied in a Document, drafted by the Imperial Inter-relations Committee, that may turn out to be as important in the history of Greater Britain as Magna Charta in that of England. Precision of definition is *not* held to be a *British forte*, but that strange, instinctive prevision that we have already remarked upon as having guided the decisive steps in the foundation of the Commonwealth, seems to have pointed to the necessity of defining once and for all the principles on which that new form of supernational association was destined to repose. And

good-fortune, or Providence, determined that the very man should be on the spot who, of all others, was capable of bringing to this task the depth of a philosopher, and the lucid discrimination of a master of English. This was Lord Balfour. He had been a Tory of the Tories and an Imperialist of the old school, and he was acting on behalf of a Tory-Imperialist Government. But in this, his last and greatest achievement, he seems to have put aside the prepossessions of the partisan, and risen to the height and inspiration of the occasion. No one can doubt that the vital section of the report, defining the status of Great Britain and the Dominions, is essentially his work.<sup>1</sup> The master touch is unmistakable.

Nothing, it is said, would be gained by laying down a Constitution for the British Empire, which "bears no real resemblance to any other political organization that has ever been tried," and therefore, by plain implication, bears no resemblance whatever to what men have hitherto called Empire.

Great Britain and the Dominions are defined as :  
"Autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate to each other in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations."

"Every self-governing member of the Empire," the report goes on to say, "is now master of its destiny. In fact, if not always in form, it is subject to no compulsion whatever."

But this is not all, for the decisive qualification is yet to come, and it is at this point that the language of the report flows with an eloquence of which it would be hard to find the like in any other official compilation :

<sup>1</sup> I hope I have done no injustice to another philosopher-statesman, General Smuts. But the form, at least, if not wholly and necessarily the substance, seems to me unmistakably Balfourian.

"The British Empire is not founded upon negations. It depends essentially, if not formally, upon positive ideals. Free institutions are its life blood. Free co-operation is its instrument. Peace, security, and progress are among its objects. . . . And though every Dominion is now, and must always remain, the sole judge of the nature and extent of its co-operation, no common cause will, in our opinion, be thereby imperilled."

One anomaly, and one only, will have struck the attentive reader, and this is the retention of the word Empire in a document which, as far as language can express anything, proclaims the formal and final dissolution, for the Dominions at any rate, of a British Empire. Disraeli had coined the motto *imperium et libertas* for the Greater Britain of his day. But the Conference of 1926 had decided that the last word alone was to suffice for the future. *Imperium* might have been good enough for Assyria, for Rome, for old Spain or new Germany; but the Anglo-Saxon genius had conceived of something greater and better, something that might, in the future, provide an alternative and higher form of human association than that of the centralized tyrannies under which the human spirit was doomed to reel back not into the beast, but into the insect or termite.

No doubt it was wise that the term Empire should be retained, and allowed to develop a special British meaning of its own. To have formally abolished it would have mobilized all the forces of reaction, and outraged popular sentiment. The name mattered little now that Britain and the Dominions were once and for all agreed about the nature of the thing, and that the answer to the riddle, "When is an Empire not an Empire?" should be, by common agreement, "When it is a Commonwealth of Nations."

Besides, outside the Dominions, the *imperium* was by no means abolished, nor could be, all at once. It would perhaps be false to say that even the will to abolish it had finally prevailed. Now that Dominion

Status had been defined, it was only the extension of an accepted ideal that it should be recognized as the natural heritage for the grant of which every member of that association, at the earliest possible moment, was to be educated and prepared. Nay more, that instead of putting off the date to some ever-receding future, those who had already been granted this freedom should have faith in its magic, backed by a proportional courage, even to the taking of risks. To trust to the free spirit of Anglo-Saxon civilization is surely the proudest and noblest form of patriotism, one not necessarily confined to the bounds even of the so-called British Empire.

These pages have made no attempt to conceal or gloss over the many failures of the English, at home and abroad, to appreciate or live up to the standard which alone could justify the use of that much abused, and much ridiculed ejaculation, "Thank God I am an Englishman!" It is only by prolonged trial and error, by the blind groping of the many and the inspired vision of a very few, that the light is attained, and that peoples come to realize the destinies for which they are chosen—if indeed there be any choice in the matter but their own.

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